# It Is What It Is

## THE PERSONAL DISCOURSES OF RUMI

New Translation and Commentary by

Doug Marman

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*by Doug Marman*

SPIRITUAL DIALOGUES PROJECT

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## THE PERSONAL DISCOURSES OF RUMI

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*There is one thing in this world that must never be forgotten. If you were to forget all else, but did not forget that, then you would have no reason to worry. But if you performed and remembered everything else, yet forgot that one thing, then you would have done nothing whatsoever.*

*It is just as if a king sent you to the country to carry out a specific task. If you go and accomplish a hundred other tasks, but do not perform that one task, then it is as though you performed nothing at all. So, everyone comes into this world for a particular task, and that is their purpose. If they do not perform it, then they will have done nothing.*

—Rumi, *Discourse Four*

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# Acknowledgments

I BEGAN WORKING ON THIS TRANSLATION of Rumi's discourses in the late 1970's. It started purely as an exercise for my own benefit. I sensed something important lurking behind Rumi's words, but it was obscured by the available translations. I knew this was partly due to my own lack of understanding, but I had the feeling that before I could discover what was hidden I would need to somehow bring Rumi's words to life for me.

So, for some ten years, I spent nights with Rumi, contemplating his stories, studying his life and his poetry, rewriting and retranslating, in hopes it might shed light on the treasure in his discourses.

Then, in the late 1980's, I invited some Sufi acquaintances, as well as friends I knew from Eckankar, who were all lovers of Rumi. We met once a month for almost a year, going through just the first 12 discourses. I learned something unexpected from this, and I owe a debt of gratitude to all those who helped me.

I realized then that I needed to start over and rewrite everything. Those classes showed me how many different levels Rumi was speaking to, and that there was far more to what he had been saying than I realized.

At this point, my project changed from doing something for myself to restoring Rumi's words so that everyone could feel the impact of his talks. I learned more from this than all the years of my previous studies of his teachings.

However, over the last decade, spending time with people who have read the e-book I posted on the Internet, and having gained many more insights myself, I realized that something more was needed. Rumi's stories weave and shift across many states of consciousness, often suddenly. This is foreign to many, which is one reason why Rumi's discourses have been considered one of his most difficult manuscripts. But the pattern behind this dance communicates an important part of his message.

So, along with updating the translation I've added commentary, with hopes that it might help bridge the gap of culture and time and reveal insights into what he is saying.

With this third rebirth of the book, I've also had a lot of support. I would like to thank Jamileh Marefat, living in Iran, who compared my translation with the original manuscript in Farsi. She found a number of areas for improvement, making this a more accurate translation than before.

Jamileh also happens to be a direct descendent of Rumi. His poetry has always been a part of her life. She remembers studying his discourses even as a child.

Also, my appreciation goes out to Phil Shepherd, David Rivinus, Patti Simpson, and Karla Joy McMechan for help with editing and making the book more readable. I would also like to thank Phil Wellman for another excellent cover design.

A special note of acknowledgment is due to Bob Winters. Bob painted the picture of Rumi on the front cover of this book. He had been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and he knew he didn't have long to live. This was one of his last paintings, and he painted it specially for this book. Rumi had long been a favorite of his.

I must also give recognition to my teachers. It was through their personal care and teaching that I was able to taste the wine that Rumi speaks about, and learn how to leave all else behind. Such experiences are not within our own powers, but are gifts.

And I cannot overstate the credit that belongs to my wife, Karen, who is my full-time editor and advisor, as well as life-partner. Believe me, live-in editors are the best kind, by far. What I've learned from her is also hidden between the pages of this book.

I'm indeed fortunate to be surrounded by so many lovers of Rumi.

—DOUG

# Introduction

RECOGNIZED BY MANY as the greatest mystical poet of all time, Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) communicated a message that has attracted spiritual seekers for over seven hundred years. Even in his day, Rumi was sought out by merchants and kings, devout worshipers and rebellious seekers, famous scholars and common peasants, both men and women became his students. At his funeral Muslims, Christians, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Turks, and Romans honored him.

Listen to his call for seekers of truth:

*Come, come, whoever you are.*
*Wanderer, worshiper,*
*Lover of leaving.*
*It doesn't matter.*
*Ours is not a caravan of despair.*
*Come, even if you have broken*
*Your vow a hundred times.*
*Come, yet again, come, come.*[1]

---

[1] Inscribed on Rumi's shrine in Konya, Turkey

Although kings became his followers, Rumi often postponed their visits, dedicating his greatest time and love to what some critics called, "the tailors, the cloth-sellers, and the petty shopkeepers—uncouth and uncultured ruffians." In other words, he cared most for those with a deep desire for truth, no matter who they were.[2]

His selflessness, tolerance and respect for others often left deep impressions on the people he met. For example, a story is told that one day, while Rumi was in contemplation surrounded by his disciples, a drunkard walked in shouting and stumbling. The man staggered toward Rumi and fell on him. To Rumi's followers such a disgrace of their teacher was intolerable, and they rose as one to rush the ignorant fool. Rumi stopped them with his raised hand, saying, "I thought this intruder was the one who was intoxicated, but now I see it is not he, but my own students who are drunk!" [3]

Rumi's honor of all religious traditions was not always popular in his day and often provoked criticism from the more dogmatic. One such challenge came from a Muslim dignitary, Qonavi, who confronted Rumi before an audience. You claim to be at one with 72 religious sects, said Qonavi, but the Jews cannot agree with the Christians, and Christians cannot agree with Muslims. If they are at odds with each other, how could you possibly be at one with them all? To this Rumi answered, "Yes, you are right. I agree with you too."[4]

Does this mean that Rumi suggests treating all religions as one? Quite the opposite. In discourse *Seven* he says:

> *When has religion ever been one? There have always been two or three, and they have always had war and fighting between them. How do you expect to make religion one?*

Each teaching has a different desire and design, he goes on to say. It is only after we look beyond the doctrines of this world that we can find "the roots of the roots of the roots of religion." This is what he is talking about: Not a set of beliefs, but the direct experience of spiritual realization, itself.

---

[2] *Life and Work of Rumi*, by Afzal Iqbal, Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1978, pages 2-3
[3] *Life and Work of Rumi*, by Afzal Iqbal, page 2
[4] *Life and Work of Rumi*, by Afzal Iqbal, page 3

Thousands believe the power of Rumi's presence still exists today and still teaches, due to the remarkable vitality found in his writings and poetry. Their depth and beauty capture the hearts of spiritual seekers around the world. They contain a timeless relevance which reaches our marrow. His verses sketch out the panorama of life from human sorrow and devotion to the breadth of Life's hidden plan.

However, his discourses are nothing like religious sermons we often hear. We need to listen to his words carefully if we want to fathom the depths he explores. For example, in discourse *Six* he says:

> *These words are for the sake of those who need words to understand. But as for those who understand without words, what use do they have for speech?*

He is pointing to a meaning beyond words and speech. But to follow where he goes, we must merge into the movement of Rumi's expressions. The flow, rhythm, and impact of his images weave a pattern of the scene he is painting. These subtleties are far more important than the points he makes, as he says in discourse *Twenty-Six*:

> *Beware! Do not say, "I have understood." The more you understand and grasp these words, the farther you will be from understanding them. Their meaning comes in not understanding.*

Rumi is not trying to explain something here. He is trying to move us beyond the need for explanations. It is not the literal meaning of his words that is important, but his state of consciousness. In other words, he is not just talking about concepts; he is using words to move us to where we can see for ourselves the reality hidden beneath the outer appearance of life.

Follow Rumi closely and you will see a string that holds one pearl to the next on his necklace. Each story, each image, is a new moment in Rumi's discourse, yet rarely is it broken from the last moment. Step by step, Rumi is dancing. We must be limber and flexible to follow without losing the thread. Behind the rhythm and pattern of Rumi's dance is his true intention.

For example, in discourse *Ten*, after Rumi talks about hidden saints who help spiritual seekers gain their inner goals, one of his students asks: "Do the great ones come before you?" He answers:

> *There is no "before" left to me. It has been a long time since I have had any "before." If they come, they come before an image they believe to be me.*

Once again he is shifting our perspective. He is taking us out of the human consciousness into the presence of divine reality, where all sense of a separate self is lost. When we forget ourselves in such a moment, what particle of personality remains?

This raises an interesting observation. Rumi is never general in his discussions. He always speaks to specific situations. He addresses the particular beliefs and conflicts of those around him. He is a witness and spokesman for the spiritual path as it manifested in his day. And his words still touch us now.

If travelers stop to rest by a rock, and this somehow alters the course of their lives, we might conclude the rock was incidental. But if that same stone affects thousands down through the centuries, each walking away with different messages and different lessons, then how can we call this an accident? If unaware people trip over a rock, they get up and walk away as if nothing happened. They learn nothing. Wise people find the meaning in such encounters. But a rock that changes the paths of travelers in every age—each time imparting a different meaning—that is not just a rock. That is God.

Over the years, I've read perhaps a hundred books on Rumi. Many are excellent. They fall mainly into two categories: Interpretative versions of Rumi's poetry, or academic literal translations and historical studies of his teachings, life and times. This book doesn't fit into either of these approaches.

While staying true to Rumi's original words, my hope is to recreate the experience of sitting at the feet of, and personally studying with, one of the world's greatest spiritual teachers. I think this is the best way of discovering the power and depth of his writings.

Scholars have uncovered fascinating stories about the world that Rumi lived in and the teachers he studied with, but I think it is a mistake to think that these influences define who he is or what he says. When it comes to understanding Rumi, I believe it is essential to leave behind our worldly and spiritual training—to set aside cultural beliefs, as Rumi himself urges—and dive into the ocean of his words. Each of us will discover different treasures. This makes the encounter far more personal and brings us closer to the actual experience of sitting in his presence as he reveals the subtle secrets of life's path.

So, I do not try to explain what Rumi means. We are better off setting aside intellectual examinations about Rumi's beliefs if we want to drink the ecstatic wine he is offering. Rumi puts it this way in discourse *Four*:

> *The great scholars of the age split hairs on details of all matters. They know perfectly and completely those sciences that do not concern Soul. But as for what is truly of importance and touches us more closely than anything else, namely our own Self, this your great scholars do not know. They make statements about everything, saying, "This is true and that is not true. This is right and that is wrong." Yet, they do not know their own Self.*

This is not a criticism of academia. What Rumi is explaining here is the limitation of trying to understand with our minds what can only be known through the personal and direct experience of Soul.

Therefore, a different approach is needed if you want to gain the full impact of Rumi's discourses. I recommend treating this not so much as a book, as a personal study. Don't read it through, which is the way for learning information and ideas, but give yourself time between each discourse for the inner rhythms of Rumi's words to seep into the depths of your consciousness. Try to apply what he suggests and reflect on the new thoughts his discourses evoke.

Pick a time, whether weekly or monthly, to study a discourse. Adjust the frequency so that it isn't rushed, but you have time to live with a discourse. Remember, Rumi did not give these discourses out back to back. His students had to wait for the next one, and this gave them time to put his teachings into practice in their lives. That is an important part of the experience.

Another part of this study that can be helpful is being able to share with others the most important things we learned from the discourse, the questions it raised, and then listening to what the discourse meant to others. This spiritual dialogue often opens up completely new insights. My commentary is intended to help with this, but we are also offering readers the ability to join on-line discussions for each discourse (it is free, there is no cost for this). See Spiritual Dialogues Project (www.spiritualdialogues.com) if you are interested.

You will gain even more if you write down your thoughts immediately after reading a discourse, and then reviewing and refining your words as you contemplate the discourse over days or weeks. Think of this as your personal study with Rumi and I'm sure it will change you in ways you never expected.

Countless teachings, groups, and countries claim Rumi as their own, showing that he is one of the most universal human figures of all time. How can we identify him exclusively with any one group? It makes more sense to see Rumi as belonging to all who feel a connection with him, the same as he accepted whoever came to visit him. He always adjusted his words to meet their state of consciousness and level of understanding.

Therefore, as you will see from his discourses, Rumi is promoting a living path, not doctrines, beliefs, or teachings from a book. He urges seekers to move beyond outer forms to witness the true secrets behind religion. What he is sharing, he explains, is eternal. Others have taught about it before him and there will be those who teach after him as well. Look to the Teacher of the Age, he advises.

Nothing in his discourses or poetry suggests he was trying to start a religion or religious order. Quite the opposite. He saw people around the world spread across hundreds of different sects. Rumi says this in discourse *Two*:

> *There is a saying that the saint is one, humankind is a hundred, meaning the saint's whole attention remains upon the one truth, while people are scattered over a hundred appearances. But which hundred? Which fifty? Which sixty? Lost in this world of mirrored reflections, they are a faceless people without hands and feet, without mind and*

> *Soul, quivering like a magic talisman, like quicksilver or mercury. They do not know who they are. Call them sixty or a hundred or a thousand, and the saint is one, but is not this view a trial itself? For the truth is that the hundreds are nothing, while the saint is a thousand, and a hundred thousand, and thousands of thousands.*

These saints are called by many names across many teachings: Sufi, Sant, Pole of the World, Eck Master, Gnostic, Sat Guru, Dervish, spiritual traveler and countless other names. They are the men and women down through time who brought the light of spirituality to the people and countries of their age.

Something flows through those who carry a living teaching, as Rumi did. It pours out into the world. You can see it in the words of their closest followers, who are often overwhelmed by the feelings of inspiration that lift them up to glimpse the whole of Life. Kings and royalty recognize and bow down to their inner authority. They attract people who are drawn to the bread of life that these spiritual leaders are offering.

To meet them begs the question: How could you think of reading books about truth, when the Beloved is right before you? Much of Rumi's poetry to his own teacher, Shams of Tabriz, describes exactly this feeling.

For this same reason I have tried to capture the inner force behind Rumi's words with this translation, to restore the personal experience of drinking from the fresh stream of his presence. I hope it brings you closer to the intoxicating realization that Rumi calls love. As he says: True lovers of God gamble away everything in hopes of finding that.

Rumi's volumes of poetry made him famous. His prose manuscript of discourses given during gatherings with his students is not so well known. *It Is What It Is* (*Fihi Ma Fihi*) is a record of these spiritual classes with Rumi that often accompanied music, the recitation of poetry and sacred phrases, and the now famous whirling dervish exercise that Rumi originated to enliven and bring spiritual opening to the rather somber people of his day.

This present book draws on A. J. Arberry's original English translation, published in 1961 as *Discourses of Rumi*. Arberry himself admitted that his scholastic, literal work "is not an easy book to read . . . and the original is by no means easy always to understand." With Jamileh Marefat's help, we have gone back to the original Farsi, to assure the accuracy of this translation, and to correct errors. I hope this edition illuminates and clarifies Rumi's original words, and builds on Professor Arberry's contribution.

I have added comments after each discourse to help as a catalyst to uncover some of the subtler meanings woven into Rumi's expressions. This commentary is in no way intended as a full explanation or even the best explanation of what the discourse is saying. In fact, the comments often say nothing about the message that comes through most clearly, while delving into Rumi's more obscure points. My only hope is to open the window a bit wider and expand the scope of our senses a bit more, as we each read and gain our own insights into the vastness of what Rumi is sharing.

If you were to compare the original manuscript of Rumi's discourses with this present book, the first change you might notice is the dropping of phrases like, "may Allah bless him and give him peace," after every reference to a saint or prophet. This was the proper and respectful way of speaking in Rumi's day, and still is today in some parts of the world. Also, Rumi makes numerable references to the Koran and quotes from it frequently. Since Rumi's listeners knew the Koran well, such quotes were familiar and personal brush strokes. However, to many readers of this book this will not be so. Therefore, I have removed a few quotes that could prove confusing to those who do not know the Koran, or that might get in the way of the flow of Rumi's message.

Rumi's reference to God is always deeply personal. Whether he uses the masculine term "Allah," or refers to God as the "Beloved," it is nearness and closeness to the ultimate reality that Rumi is expressing. Unfortunately, the English language has no personal, neutral pronoun for God. To always use "He" in referring to God, to mankind, or to any general person, was common practice when Arberry released his edition, but is too masculine today. In Rumi's Persian language, "God" has no gender, and Rumi's symbolic portrayal of

God uses images of the Lover and the Ocean as often as the King. Therefore, I use "It" to refer to God in places, to help rise above gender, but also use "He" and "Beloved" to capture the personal closeness of Rumi's message.

Clearly, our language has not caught up with the modern need for pronouns that are neither masculine nor feminine, so it seems a good time to improvise. I have broken with traditional rules of grammar at times by using the terms "them" and "their" when referring to a singular person, instead of trying to go back and forth between "he" and "she". These plural pronouns are wonderfully gender neutral and offer a natural approach that seems closest to our common speech.

As with Rumi's poetry, almost all of his discourses were originally written in Farsi, which was the main language of Persia in those days, and still is in Iran today. Rumi was born near Balkh, which was a part of old Iran back then, but today is in Afghanistan, not far from the Hindu Kush mountain range. The manuscript was first recorded by Rumi's students, who took down his words as he was speaking. From what we know, Rumi made it a practice to review and correct these discourses, the same as with his poetry, before releasing them for publication. So, they are true to his intentions.

A note on the italicized phrases in the discourses: If they are in quote marks, then they are from the Koran. Without quote marks, they are from another source—sometimes from Rumi's own poetry. Italicized phrases in my commentary are quotes from Rumi's discourse.

Many of the terms Rumi uses have a different meaning than the closest English words available. For example, the word for what Rumi calls "belief" is much closer to what we might call "knowingness." This is not the same as "faith," which often refers to a person's hopes. The Quakers have a term known as "convincement" that expresses some of this, but still betrays too much of our own choice in the matter. When Rumi uses the word "belief," he means more about having experienced something that changes how we see life, than having been sold on some doctrine.

As Rumi tells us over and over again, it is not words from books that are important, but the awareness gained through inner experience that we should seek. Therefore, over and over again, he is urging us to go beyond names and forms, doctrines and holy texts. However, this is often more difficult than it sounds. We inevitably run into passages where the stark difference between Rumi's culture and our own seems to rise up and stand in our way.

Rumi talks about this in discourse *Twelve*:

> *A westerner lives in the West. An oriental comes to visit. The westerner is a stranger to the oriental, but who is the real stranger? Is not the oriental a stranger to the entire western world?*

In other words, sure the ideas and beliefs from other ages and areas of the world sound foreign and wrong to us, because they are strangers to our thoughts. But if someone always speaks and acts from Truth, then who is the real stranger to Truth?

Rumi continues:

> *This whole world is but a house, no more. Whether we go from this room to that room or from this corner to that corner, are we still not in the same house? But the saints who possess God's jewel have left this house. They have gone beyond. Mohammad said, "Islam began a stranger and will return a stranger as it began."*

In this way, Rumi's words come right through time and ask us today, "Can you see that those who possess spiritual awareness will always be a stranger to this world?" So, who is out of date? Certainly anyone bound by the culture of their time, anyone who is not moved by something greater.

If you see what is happening here, you will see that Rumi uses our own unexamined cultural reactions to teach us. Some of Rumi's most profound poetry is ignored because of such thorns, prompting him to say in discourse *Thirty-Five*:

> *How wonderfully gracious God is! It sets a seal on those who listen and do not understand, argue and yet learn nothing.*

> *God is gracious. Its wrath is gracious, and even Its lock is gracious. But Its lock is nothing next to Its unlocking, for the grace of that is indescribable. If I shatter into pieces, it is through the infinite grace of God's unlocking.*

The title of Rumi's discourses offers a great example of all that is hidden behind his words. *Fihi Ma Fihi* was translated by Arberry to *In It What Is In It*, but I believe *It Is What It Is* comes closer to Rumi's intent. In any case, this title is filled with multiple meanings, just as are all of Rumi's works. This may sound like an odd idea; that someone could be communicating many things at many levels at the same time, but let us look closely at this title for a moment.

First, it is making a very specific, physical reference. "It," meaning this manuscript, is the same as what is in "It," meaning Rumi's most famous work, his six volume poem, the *Masnavi*. In other words, *Fihi Ma Fihi* provides explanations and keys to unlock the meaning of the *Masnavi*. The two works were written parallel to each other and contain many references and stories that are continued from one to the other. This being true, it is quite surprising that Rumi's discourses have not gained more attention. But this is only one of the title's meanings, and by no means the most important.

At another level, *It Is What It Is* asks us not to put into this manuscript more or less than what it is. It is not clothed in the high cloth of religious sanctity, nor does it speak as some authority. Rumi wants us simply to see it for what it is. He wants us to be emotionally honest and not to get carried away with the form. In other words, don't become attached to the beauty of this vase, it is merely a holder of The Rose.

At the same time, "It" refers to God. Therefore God is what God is. This is the same as the Muslim saying, "There is no God but God." In other words, Rumi asks, "What more is there to say?" All the words here, all the stories and explanations, are saying nothing more than this. There is no more to reality than reality. God is. Reality is. It is what it is. Explanations cannot explain it. Words cannot reveal it.

And so, "It," meaning the manuscript, is what "It," meaning God or reality, is. Therefore, *Fihi Ma Fihi* is cut from the same cloth as Truth; it is the same substance as God.

If you can see these many meanings, all swimming like fish in the ocean that is the title, then you will know how to read Rumi. May it also help you catch real fish as well.

—DOUG MARMAN

# One

RUMI BEGINS SPEAKING to a group of his students and visitors, including the Amir, Mu'in al-Din, local ruler of the region. Rumi says:

Mohammad, the great Prophet, once said: "The worst of scholars are those who visit princes, and the best of princes are those who visit scholars. Wise is the prince who stands at the door of the poor, and wretched are the poor who stand at the door of the prince."

Now, taking the outward sense of these words, people think that scholars should never visit princes or they will become the worst of scholars. That is not the true meaning. Rather, the worst of scholars are those who depend upon princes and who revolve their life and purpose around the attention and favor of princes. Such scholars take up learning in hopes that princes will give them presents, hold them in esteem, and promote them to office.

Therefore, such scholars improve themselves and pursue knowledge for the sake of princes. They become scholars from their fear of princes. They subject themselves to the princes' control. They conform themselves to the plans that princes map out for them. So, whether they visit a prince, or a prince visits them, still in every case they're the visitors, and it is the prince who is visited.

However, when scholars do not study to please princes, but instead pursue learning from first to last for the sake of truth—when their actions and words spring from the truth they have learned and put to use because this is their nature and they cannot live otherwise, just as fish can only thrive in water—such scholars subject themselves to the control and direction of God. They become blessed with the guidance of the prophets. Everyone living in their time is touched by them and derives inspiration from their example, whether they are aware of the fact or not.

Should such scholars visit a prince, they are still the ones visited and the prince is the visitor, because in every case it is the prince who takes from these scholars and receives help from them. Such scholars are independent of the prince. They are like the light-giving sun, whose whole function is giving to all, universally, converting stones into rubies and carnelians, changing mountains into mines of copper, gold, silver, and iron, making the earth fresh and green, bringing fruit to the trees and warmth to the breeze. Their trade is giving; they do not receive. The Arabs have expressed this in a proverb: "We have learned in order to give; we have not learned in order to take." And so in all ways they are the visited and the prince is the visitor.

A thought comes to me at this point to comment on a verse from the Koran, although it is not related to the present discourse. However, since this idea comes to me now, I want to express it so that it can go on record.

> *"O Prophet, say to the prisoners in your hands: 'If God knows of any good in your hearts, He will give you more than He has taken, and He will forgive you. Surely God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.'"*

This verse was revealed when Mohammad had defeated the attacking unbelievers, slaying, plundering and taking prisoners, whom he tied hand and foot. Amongst the prisoners was his uncle, 'Abbas. The chained people wept and wailed all night in their helpless humiliation. They had given up all hope of their lives, expecting the sword and slaughter. Mohammad, seeing this, laughed.

"Look!" the prisoners exclaimed. "He shows the traits of a person after all. This claim that he is superhuman is not true. There he stands looking at us prisoners in these chains, enjoying it. Just like everyone ruled by their passions; when they gain victory over their enemies and see their opponents vanquished to their will, they rejoice and feel glad."

"Not so," answered Mohammad, seeing what was in their hearts. "Never would I laugh at the sight of enemies conquered by my hand, or at the sight of your suffering. But I do rejoice, in fact I laugh, because with inner vision I see myself dragging and drawing people by collars and chains out of the black smoke of Hell into Paradise, while they complain and cry, 'Why are you pulling us from this pit of self-destruction into that garden of security?' So, laughter overcomes me.

"But since you have not yet been granted the vision to see what I am saying, listen. God commands me to say this to you: First you gathered your forces and mustered your might, trusting completely in your own virtue and valor. You said to yourselves, 'We will conquer the Muslims and vanquish them.' But you did not see that One Power more powerful than yourselves. You did not know the One Force above your force. So, everything you planned turned out the opposite. Even now in your fear, you still hold onto your beliefs and do not see the One Reality over you. Rather than facing that Power, you see my power, because it is easier for you to see yourselves conquered by me.

"But even in your present state, still I say to you: If you recognize my power, and accept yourselves vanquished to my will in all circumstances, I can still deliver you from this grief. He, who is able to bring forth a black bull from a white bull, can also produce a white bull from a black bull. Turn away from your former ways, and likewise I will return to you all the property that has been taken from you, in fact many times as much. Even more, I will absolve you of all blame and grant you prosperity in this world and the world to come."

"I have repented," said 'Abbas. "I have turned from my former ways."

Mohammad said, "God demands a token of this claim you make, for easy it is to boast of love, but other is the proof thereof."

"In Allah's name, what token do you demand?" asked 'Abbas.

"Give all the properties that remain to you for the army of Islam, so the army of Islam may be strengthened," said Mohammad. "That is, of course, if you have truly become a Muslim and desire the good of Islam and Muslimdom."

"Prophet of God, what remains to me?" said 'Abbas. "They have taken everything, leaving me not so much as an old reed-mat."

"You see," said Mohammad, "you have not yet given up your old ways. You have not yet seen the light of truth. Should I tell you how much property you still have? Where you have hidden it? To whom you have entrusted it? Where you concealed and buried it?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed 'Abbas.

"Did you not entrust so much property specifically to your mother?" asked Mohammad. "Did you not bury your gold under such and such a wall? Did you not tell your mother in detail, 'If I return, give this back to me. But if I do not return safely, then spend so much upon such and such an object, and give so much to So-and-So, and so much is to be for yourself'?"

When 'Abbas heard these words he raised his hand in complete acceptance. "Prophet of God," he said, "truly, I have always thought you carried the fortune of the old kings, such as Haman, Shaddad, Nimrod and the rest. But now that you have spoken I know this favor is divine, from the world beyond, from the throne of God."

"Now you have spoken truly," said Mohammad. "This time I have heard the snapping of the girdle of doubt that you had within you. I have an ear hidden within my inmost Soul, and with that hidden ear I can hear the snapping of doubt within anyone. Now it is true, for a fact, that you believe."

I am telling this story to the Amir for this reason: In the beginning you came forward as a champion of Muslimdom. "I ransom myself," you said. "I sacrifice my own desires, considerations and judgment so that Islam will remain secure and strong." But because you put your trust in your own plans, losing sight of God, and forgetting that all things proceed from God, all your intentions have turned out the opposite. Having struck a bargain with the Tartars, you are unintentionally giving them assistance to destroy the Syrians and the Egyptians, which in the end may bring ruin to the realm of Islam. So God has turned this plan you made for the survival of Islam, into Islam's own destruction.

Turn your face to God, for things are in a dangerous condition. Yet, even in your present state, my friend, do not give up hope, but look to God and give yourself up to Its will. You thought your own strength of spirit proceeded from yourself, just as 'Abbas and the prisoners did, thus you have fallen into weakness. But do not give up hope, because He who can produce weakness from strength can bring forth an even greater strength from this weakness. Just as Mohammad rejoiced during the prisoners' grief, so too I find joy in your present embarrassment, because from this weakness and suffering can come something greater than what was lost. Therefore, do not give up hope, for

> *"Of God's comfort no one despairs, except the unbelievers."*

My purpose in speaking this way to the Amir is so that he can see the matter correctly and accept the will of God humbly. He has fallen out of an exceedingly high state into a low state, yet in this way he may grow. Life can show the most wonderful things, but behind all of them lies a trap should we forget the source of this wonder. God has devised this plan so that we will learn not to claim, out of arrogance and vanity, these ideas and plans as our own.

If everything were, in truth, as it appears to be, Mohammad, endowed as he was with a vision so penetrating, so illuminated, would never have cried,

> *"Lord, show me things as they are. You show a thing as fair, and in reality it is ugly. You show a thing as ugly, and, in truth, it is beautiful. Show us everything just as it is, so that we will not fall into the snare."*

Now, your judgment, however good and luminous it may be, is certainly not better than the Prophet's judgment. So do not put your trust in every idea and every notion, but only in God and Its wisdom.

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## COMMENTARY

Before we delve into the heart of this discourse, I would like to address the story of Mohammed and ‘Abbas. Some have been troubled by this. A few were so disturbed that they wrote to me wondering if they could read anything from Rumi again. How could they listen to anyone supporting Mohammed's conversion of others by the sword?

Interestingly, this concern doesn't arise from the story, itself, but from reactions that color our way of seeing what Rumi is saying. For example, readers often miss the fact that this story is about people who were attacking Mohammed to kill him and bring an end to his new teaching of Islam. Mohammed is defending himself and his people.

> *This verse was revealed when Mohammad had defeated the attacking unbelievers . . .*

Then, later when talking to ‘Abbas, it says:

> *You said to yourselves, "We will conquer the Muslims and vanquish them."*

Rumi mentions this in two places. Mohammed was not the aggressor. He did not start this fight. Even more importantly, while the Arabian people of his time were quick to take offense, were often warlike and could be vengeful in his day, Mohammed taught and practiced the opposite.[5] He said that war was only just and holy when fought to defend against attackers: "And fight in the way of God with those who fight with you, but aggress not. God loves not the aggressors." He also made every effort to settle disagreements in a friendly way and insisted that Muslims accept peace whenever it was offered: "If they incline to peace, then incline to it and trust in Allah."

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[5] *Muhammad: A Prophet For Our Time*, by Karen Armstrong, HarperCollins, New York, 2007, pages 6–7

Just as significantly, this is not a story about Mohammed converting anyone by the sword. In fact, Mohammed never condoned forcing others to believe. He wrote, "there is no compulsion in religion," making it clear that force and persecution should never be used to change a person's beliefs.

*Jihad dar Islam* (Holy War in Islam), written by Ayatollah Salehi Najafabadi of Iran and recently translated into English, thoroughly explores Mohammed's words and actions. The book clearly shows that the modern misinterpretation of Jihad began over a hundred years after Mohammed, by a series of "cruel Caliphs" who greedily wanted to expand their empires. They used the name of religion as an excuse and misused the words of the Koran to justify their violent aggression.

We can now see how far Muslim terrorists have wandered from Mohammed's teaching. This is a perfect illustration of the ways that devotees can depart from what their own founders taught. We find this in every religion.

Even more significant: Look at how incredibly generous Mohammed acts in this story that Rumi tells. This is often overlooked.

Let's put this in perspective: An army was raised to attack Mohammed and his people, but he prevailed. He threw his attackers into jail. Then he tells 'Abbas if he just gives up his former ways and recognizes the greater life Mohammed is teaching that he will free 'Abbas and restore all of his land. 'Abbas had fought to kill Mohammed and the Muslims, but Mohammed is ready to set him free with one sign of friendship. Think of how generous that really is. Can you think of a recent war where prisoners were made such an offer?

The reason Rumi tells this story to the Amir is to illustrate how easily we forget the higher purpose of life, and how quickly we put our hopes and beliefs in our own ideas and plans, thinking we know what is best. Yet, our reactions to other cultures cause us to make exactly this mistake, preventing us from seeing clearly.

When our feelings are strongest and we seem the most sure we are right and justified, this is exactly the time to step back and see what is really happening. This is Rumi's point: To search beneath appearances for the truth. Our own reactions to this story end up being the perfect example.

Now let's delve into the heart of this discourse.

Visualize, for a moment, Rumi, a well-known teacher in his day, as he explains to the Amir, a local prince, the real meaning of why princes should call on scholars but scholars should not call on princes. It is not about rank, Rumi says, but about the desire for truth.

There is a subtle message here and it is crafted so delicately that the Amir knows what Rumi is really saying to him: Yes, it is good that you have come to visit me—but have you come to visit the great Rumi, or have you come in pursuit of wisdom? If you are visiting just to gain from my reputation, then it is really I who am the prince and you who are the scholar.

Picture Rumi advising the Amir on mistakes he made and the dangers of losing sight of God while handling the affairs of the country. If you can see how everything Rumi says in this discourse is for the benefit of the Amir, you will realize how specific and focused Rumi's teachings are.

Visitors meeting Rumi for the first time might imagine he is just exploring a saying from the Koran or is talking in general about spiritual principles. But his long-time students know how carefully his lessons are aimed.

They know this because they have themselves been the focus of Rumi's gaze. They have seen their own dilemmas and challenges brought out before the class as Rumi delved into the depths of their meaning. Feel the blush of those students and you will know what it is like to sit with Rumi as he teaches.

At the same time, envision all the others in the room who are listening, including readers hundreds of years later. It seems as if Rumi is talking to us as well. His words speak to our own issues and our own lives. Because of this, I believe Rumi was addressing whoever his discourses would reach, and he focused his gaze upon every reader who would read his words.

Does this seem hard to believe?

Why do you suppose Rumi tells us that those who search for truth because they cannot live any other way—like a fish that cannot live without water—are like the life-giving sun?

> *Everyone living in their time is touched by them and derives from their example, whether they are aware of the fact or not.*

Everyone is touched by such teachers of Reality, whether they are aware of it or not. This shows that Rumi knows it is not just those who hear his words directly that are affected. Everyone is changed by them, because what they do and say reverberates with a living truth that ripples out and awakens life.

In other words, Rumi is telling us that we are moved in ways we do not realize.

Where do our inspirations come from? How subtly are the seeds planted? On what breeze have they blown into our garden? How long have they lain dormant in our earth until something in our life stirs them? Who picked them up unknowingly and carried them across the world to us?

Truth is a substance, a spiritual substance. It surrounds us invisibly, just like the water that fish live in. It is so much a part of us that we can't see it. But everything changes the moment we become aware of it.

Therefore, this search for Truth is not about us alone. The realizations we gain, the discoveries we make, are the results of changes in consciousness that reach out without words and alter the world, whether we are aware of the fact or not. And this is the second meaning of that quote above: Not only are we often unaware from where our spiritual upliftment comes, but also those who seek Truth—because they cannot do anything else, because something inside of them would die if they stopped—they are also touching others, whether they know it or not.

They might only think they are searching for their own spiritual survival and growth; but their journey of the heart radiates like the sun and transforms base metals into gold...whether they realize it or not. In other words, our essential human nature becomes changed by our desire for truth.

Think of how a moment in your life is forever altered by a single realization. You suddenly recognize its meaning. All at once you grasp reality. That moment transmutes something ordinary into something priceless. This is the power of awareness, and this is why Rumi advises the Amir to seek out such teachers of Truth. They will indeed change our lives.

Whether Rumi visits the Amir or the Amir visits Rumi makes no difference, because it is the longing for truth that draws truth, and it is awareness that draws the longing for awareness.

This is not just a subjective change that happens within us, although it might seem this way at first. It also alters the things of our lives and the world around us. Our friends and family recognize something is different.

Rumi knows this, and he knows that all of time and space are nothing compared to the awakening of consciousness. That is why I believe Rumi knew his words would touch us, even hundreds of years later.

As Shams-i-Tabriz, Rumi's teacher, said: "Even if it be after a thousand years, these words will reach those for whom they're intended."[6]

* * *

I have added comments after these discourses in hopes of shedding a hint of this light on Rumi's writings that his words have shed on me. He interweaves so many layers of meaning that I am often overwhelmed. However, I hope it helps to illuminate in a small way some of the subtleties of Rumi's message. These comments could not possibly in any way be complete, nor are they intended to be. For a full understanding, we must each dive into the Ocean that Rumi is referring to and find the pearls ourselves. I am only trying to touch on a few of the subtler threads that might be obscure or to help add a little more background to show the relevance of Rumi's words in our modern times.

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[6] *Me and Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi,* translated by William C. Chittick, Fons Vitae, Kentucky, 2004

# Two

SOMEONE SAYS: "Our Master does not utter a word."

Rumi answers: Well, it was the idea of me that brought you to my presence. This thought of me did not speak with you saying, "How are things with you?" The inner image without words drew you here. If the reality of me draws you without words and transports you to another place, what is so wonderful with words? Words are the shadow of reality, a mere branch of reality. Since the shadow draws, how much more the reality!

Words are a pretext. It is the inner bond that draws one person to another, not words. If someone should see a hundred thousand miracles and divine blessings, still, without an inner connection to that saint or prophet who was the source of those miracles, all these phenomena would come to nothing. It is this inward element that draws and moves us. If there were no element of amber in straw, the straw would never be attracted to the amber [Rumi is referring to static electricity here]. They would not cling to each other, even if you rubbed the amber with fur. This exchange between them is hidden, not a visible thing.

It is the idea that brings us. The thought of a garden brings us to the garden. The thought of a shop brings us to the shop. However, within these thoughts is a secret deception. Have you never gone to a certain place thinking it would be good, only to find disappointment? These ideas then are like a shroud, and within that shroud someone is hidden. The day reality draws you and the shroud of thought disappears, there will be no disappointment. Then you will see reality as it is, and nothing more.

*"Upon that day when the secrets are tried."*

So, what reason is there for me to speak? In reality that which draws is a single thing, but it appears to be many. We are possessed by a hundred different desires. "I want vermicelli," we say. "I want ravioli. I want halvah. I want fritters. I want fruit. I want dates." We name these one by one, but the root of the matter is a single thing: the root is hunger. Don't you see how, once we have our fill of but one thing, we say, "Nothing else is necessary?" Therefore, it was not ten or a hundred things, but one thing that drew us.

*"And their number We have appointed only as a trial."*

The many things of this world are a trial appointed by God, for they hide the single reality. There is a saying that the saint is one, humankind is a hundred, meaning the saint's whole attention remains upon the one truth, while people are scattered over a hundred appearances. But which hundred? Which fifty? Which sixty? Lost in this world of mirrored reflections, they are a faceless people without hands and feet, without mind and Soul, quivering like a magic talisman, like quicksilver or mercury. They do not know who they are. Call them sixty or a hundred or a thousand, and the saint is one, but is not this view a trial itself? For the truth is that the hundreds are nothing, while the saint is a thousand, and a hundred thousand, and thousands of thousands.

A king once gave a single soldier the rations for a hundred men. The army protested, but the king said nothing. When the day of battle arrived, all the men fled the field, except that one soldier who fought alone. "There you are," the king said. "It was for this I fed one man as a hundred."

It behooves us to strip away all our prejudices and seek out a friend of God. However, when we spend our whole life in the company of people who lack discrimination, then our own discriminative faculty becomes weak, and that true friend may pass us by unrecognized.

Discrimination is a quality that is always hidden in a person. Don't you see that a madman possesses hands and feet but lacks common sense? The ability to recognize truth is a subtle essence within you. Yet, day and night you are occupied with nurturing this physical form that doesn't know right from wrong. You make the false claim: That inner reality exists because of this. Why do you care so much for this physical and forget that? The physical exists because of that, but that in no way depends on this.

The light that shines through the windows of the eyes and ears— if these windows did not exist, that light would not stop. It would find other windows to shine through. If you bring a lamp before the sun, do you say, "I see the sun by means of this lamp"? God forbid! If you did not bring the lamp, the sun would still shine. What need is there for a lamp?

Never break off the hope for God. Hope is the secret of the path to security. Even if you don't walk this road, remember the secret of hope. Don't say, "I've committed many wrongs." Don't hold yourself back. Turn to rightness and leave those wrongs behind. Be true like the straight rod of Moses when he faced the Pharaoh's magicians. They turned their sticks into deadly snakes, but his rod swallowed up those clever tricks. If you've done wrong, don't give up hope, since you've only done it to yourself. How could anything you do ever hurt God?

*A bird lands on a mountain,*
*Then flies away —*
*Tell me, what was added to that mountain?*
*What was lost?*

Once you become true, wrongness disappears. Know this! Don't give up hope.

The danger in associating with kings is not that you may lose your life. We must lose our life in the end anyway, whether today or tomorrow does not matter. The danger arises from the fact that when kings enter upon the scene and the spell of their influence gains strength, becoming like a great lamp, the person who keeps company with them, claims their friendship, and accepts money from them will inevitably speak in accordance with their desires. That person will listen to the kings' mundane views with the utmost attention and will not be able to deny them.

That is where the danger lies; it leads to a fading respect for the true light. When you cultivate the interest of kings, that other interest which is fundamental to the spiritual life becomes a stranger to you. The more you proceed down the path of kings, the more that direction where the Beloved dwells becomes lost. The more you make your peace with worldly people, the more the Beloved turns away from you. Going in their direction renders you subject to their rule. Once you have turned down their path, in the end God gives them power over you.

It is a pity to reach the ocean and to be satisfied with a little pitcher-full from the sea. After all, there are pearls in the sea, and from the sea come a myriad of precious things. What is the value in just taking water? What pride can intelligent people have in that? This world is a mere foam fleck of the True Sea. That Ocean is the science of the saints, and within that Water is the Pearl Itself.

This world is but foam full of flotsam. Yet, through the turning of the waves and the rhythmic surging of the sea in constant motion, this foam takes on a certain beauty. But this beauty is a borrowed thing coming from elsewhere. It is a false coin that sparkles to the eye.

People are the astrolabe of God, but it requires an astronomer to use the astrolabe. If a vegetable-seller or a greengrocer should find the astrolabe, what good would it do them? From that astrolabe, what could they know of the movements of the circling stars and the positions of the planets, their influences and so forth? But in the hands of the astronomer, the astrolabe becomes truly valuable.

*"Those who know themselves know God."*

Just as this copper astrolabe reflects the movements of the heavens like a mirror, so the human being is the astrolabe of God.

*"We have honored the children of Adam."*

Those who are moved by God to see the one reality and learn Its ways through the astrolabe of their own being, behold moment by moment, flash by flash, the testament of God. Indeed, it is an infinite beauty that never leaves their mirror.

God has servants who cloak themselves in a wisdom, knowingness and grace invisible to others. Out of their excessive jealousy and love for God these servants cloak themselves, just like Mutanabbi says of beautiful women:

*Figured silks they wore,*
*Not to beautify,*
*But to guard their beauty*
*From lustful eyes.*

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi sits on the floor with his students, deep in contemplation. After a long time passes, perhaps an hour, someone cannot help himself from speaking. The silence is unbearable. He says, "Our Master doesn't utter a word."

Rumi answers, showing that he has been listening intently. He has been present and aware the whole time.

His response turns into an illuminating lesson, far deeper than the simple remark made. And yet it is a direct answer to not only the exact words spoken, but to the multitude of meanings hidden behind it.

If only we can listen to and hear Rumi's words with the depths that he understands even the most casual of comments from his students.

He starts off indirectly, explaining that his hour of silence did not mean he was not teaching. Indeed, he had been sharing something that words could only hint at. It was the student who could not hear this inner teaching because of his dependence on words. He then beckons this student to find the meaning behind his speech. Rumi is saying, "Loosen your hold on this outer form and connect directly with the source of these words."

*. . . without an inner connection to that saint or prophet. . .*

In other words, all of religion comes to nothing without that inner connection. Outer words and teachings mean nothing without that link.

Therefore, strip off the outer cloaks of appearances and see with inner eyes the true reality. It is this spiritual substance shining through the outer forms that gives them life. Listen to it and see it directly. Give up this dependency on the outer form.

All these outer things, after all, are merely a trial. They hide what is real. The beauty they contain is borrowed. Truth is something eternal. Close one window and the sun's light is not extinguished. It comes through another window. It might look different, but it is the same sun.

The reality of things is what draws us on, whether we realize it or not. But do we look for this reality, or are we caught up in the thousand things? Do we look beneath the shrouds of our desires to see their true purpose?

If we do, we will see that through all the thousands and thousands of things we search for, there is really just one thing we truly want.

*Therefore, it was not ten or a hundred things, but one thing that drew us.*

The danger of wealth and power is that they distract us from Truth. When our eyes turn toward outer prosperity and riches, we grant them power over us. We then want to be liked by those who are famous. We start wondering how to receive gifts from those with money. We become the servants of power.

> *It is a pity to reach the ocean and to be satisfied with a pitcher-full from the sea.*

What ocean is Rumi talking about?

> *That Ocean is the science of the saints, and within that Water is the Pearl Itself.*

He is still answering the student. He is still explaining how much more there is than mere words. How can you be satisfied with words when the inner teachings—the science of the saints—contains all that you ever desired?

This Pearl is hidden within you, but how can you expect to recognize it until you have learned this science?

It is only in the hands of the astronomer that the astrolabe becomes valuable. Others might read sacred books yet never see what those books really mean. They might look within themselves but never see God.

> *People are the astrolabe of God, but it requires an astronomer to use the astrolabe.*

There are those who long for the True Desire so deeply that they search beneath every shroud and desire that crosses their heart. They learn to discriminate even the meaning of their own careless feelings and to understand the secrets hidden within them.

> *Indeed, it is an infinite beauty that never leaves their mirror.*

But there is another reason why Rumi was silent and chooses to teach through silence:

> *God has servants who cloak themselves in a wisdom, knowingness and grace invisible to others. Out of their excessive jealousy and love for God these servants cloak themselves…*

Rumi is explaining that there is a limit to how much a teacher can reveal outwardly before attracting too much attention and becoming an object of worship. The personality then becomes just another of the hundred things that hide true wisdom. It draws the wrong kind of desires—not true love for God. This is why there are some who shun public displays and work only through spiritual channels.

Silence is the cloak of the inner teachings.

*. . . to guard their beauty from lustful eyes.*

* * *

These are far from the only interpretations of this discourse. For example, you may notice that the student's question was not so much a careless comment as an expression of his hunger. Rumi explains where words lie in the scope of Reality. He then goes on to tell a story about hunger, when he describes how we ask for vermicelli, or ravioli or fritters. It is the hunger that matters.

You will probably become entranced by Rumi's whirling dance of words that spin within each other. He tells us that words mean nothing, and then through his explanation his words open doors to new visions of what words cannot describe. It becomes like a spinning vortex that pulls us deeper into Reality, shorn of all outer form. How does he do this? We must let go of our thinking to follow him. He isn't speaking so much as taking us somewhere. Can you see how this merges into the whirling dance of the dervishes that he started?

You might also notice that the story of the veiled women was not just about how Muslim women hide their beauty from lustful eyes. Hidden in this example is also how they unveil themselves within their homes. Thus, if you want to see true beauty, you must look within yourself where all veils are dropped.

Hopefully, from this you can see that there are hundreds of threads woven together in these discourses. Pick one and follow it. Any one will do. Where does it take you? It isn't the thought of it that matters, it is the experience. And yes, this too is exactly what he was telling us with this discourse.

# Three

THE AMIR SAYS: "Night and day my heart and Soul are intent on serving God, but because of my responsibilities with Mongol affairs I have no time for such service."

Rumi answers: Those works, too, are work done for God, since they are the means for providing peace and security for your country. You sacrifice yourself, your possessions, and your time so the hearts of others will be lifted to peacefully obeying God's will. This, too, is good work. God has inclined you towards such noble labor, and your great love for what you do is proof of God's blessing. However, if your love of work were to weaken, this would be a sign of grace denied, for God leads only those who are worthy into the right attitudes that will earn spiritual rewards.

Take the case of a hot bath. Its heat comes from the fuel that is burned, such as dry hay, firewood, dung and the like. In the same way, God uses what to outward appearance looks evil and nasty, yet in reality is the means to cleanliness. Like a bath, men and women fired by the efforts of work become purified and a benefit to all people.

(At this point some friends arrive. Rumi excuses himself and says:) If I do not attend to you, and do not welcome you or ask after you, this is really a mark of respect. Respect is what is appropriate for the occasion. When someone is at prayer, they should not stop to greet their father and brother. Disregard of friends while being engaged in prayer is the highest regard and the greatest courtesy, since that person does not break away from absorption with God on account of dear ones. This saves those loved ones from being subject to Divine reproach. Therefore, true respect is not a social pleasantry, but is concern for the spiritual honor of others.

Someone asks: "Is there any way nearer to God than prayer?"

Rumi answers: Yes, but it is also prayer. It is prayer without the outward form. This outer form of prayer is the body of prayer, since it has a beginning and ending. Everything that has a beginning and ending is a body. All words and sounds have a beginning and an end, and therefore are form and body. But the inner soul of prayer is unconditioned and infinite and has neither beginning nor end.

Now, Mohammad, who invented the Muslim prayer, said, "I have a time with God not contained by any prophet, nor limited by any angel next to God." Hence we realize that the soul of prayer is not the outer form alone. Rather it is a complete absorption, a state without room for these outward forms. Gabriel himself, who is pure reality, cannot be found therein.

It is related that one day friends found my father in a state of complete absorption. The hour of prayer arrived and these friends called out to my father, "It is time for prayer." My father did not heed their words, so they arose and occupied themselves with the prayer. However, two friends stayed with my father and did not stand up to pray.

Now, one of those who was praying was named Khvajagi. It was shown to him clearly in his inward heart that all those who were at prayer were standing behind the Prophet with their backs turned to Mecca, while the two who were with my father were facing Mecca. Since my father had passed away from any sense of personal identity, his self no longer remaining, having been consumed in the Light of God, he had become the Light of God.

Whoever turns their back on the Light of God and faces the wall of their prayer-niche has surely turned their back on Mecca. For God's light is the soul of the Mecca-ward direction.

Mohammad once rebuked a friend, saying, "I called you. Why didn't you come?" The friend replied, "I was occupied with prayer." The Prophet said, "Well, wasn't I calling you for God?" The friend answered, "I am helpless."

It is good to feel helpless every moment, seeing yourself helpless in success, just as in failure. For above your capacity there is a greater Capacity, and your will is subject to that greater Will in every case. You are not divided into two halves, now capable, now helpless. You are always helpless, only sometimes remembering, sometimes forgetting.

When you remember, then the heart of that moment becomes visible, and the way opens up before you. Indeed, what is our condition, seeing that lions, tigers and crocodiles are all helpless and tremble before God? Even the heavens and earth are helpless and subject to Its decree.

God is a mighty emperor. Its Light is not like the light of the moon or sun where some form abides in its place. When God's Light shines forth unveiled, neither heaven nor earth remain, neither sun nor moon. Nothing remains but that great Reality.

A certain king said to a dervish, "In the moment when you find revelation and propinquity in the Court of God, remember me." The dervish replied, "When I come into that Presence, and the Light of that Sun shines upon me, I will no more remember myself. How, then, can I remember you?"

Even still, make a request of such a dervish, who is utterly absorbed, and even without them mentioning you or your needs in God's presence, still the request is fulfilled.

There was once a king who had a favorite and highly confidential servant. Whenever that servant set out for the royal palace, people who had a request to make presented him with their histories and their letters, begging him to submit them to the king. He would place the documents in his wallet. On coming into the king's presence, he could not endure the splendor of the king's beauty, and would fall down dumbfounded. The king would then, in a loving manner, put his hand into his wallet, saying, "What does this servant of mine, who is utterly absorbed in my beauty, have here?"

In this way he found the letters and would endorse the petitions of every man and woman, and then return the documents into the wallet. So he would attend to the needs of every one of them, without that servant ever submitting them, so that not a single one was rejected. On the contrary, their demands were granted many times over, and they attained far more than they asked for. But in the case of other servants who retained consciousness and were able to present and indicate to the king the histories of the people in need—out of a hundred requests and a hundred needs, only one might be fulfilled.

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## COMMENTARY

This discourse begins with the Amir expressing concerns about his responsibilities that keep him from the time he should be devoting to God. Rumi assures him that his worldly work is also done for God.

God is not something separate from life. It is a part of everything. Sometimes we remember this and sometimes we forget, but we are always involved in God's work whether we realize it or not.

Rumi's reason for saying this is not just to impart a higher perspective. He is also showing the Amir a new approach. Love for what we do is something that purifies us and benefits the world. Therefore, love for work is a way of acting for God. We cannot always know the benefit of what we do, but we can know what attitude inspires us to carry our responsibilities.

Even the most menial and contentious tasks can bring about a spiritual opening if done with care and love. Just like dung and hay can be used to heat baths, so the approach we take with our physical jobs can transform our earthly duties into a path of awakening.

> *God leads only those who are worthy into the right attitudes that will earn spiritual rewards.*

After these few words from Rumi, he goes into silent contemplation. The Amir and others in the room join him in inward prayer for perhaps an hour. During this time other friends arrive. They quietly take seats upon the floor and try to enter deeper states using the spiritual practices Rumi taught them.

Afterwards, Rumi excuses himself for not welcoming the newcomers because he was deep in meditation. He wants them to know that his not welcoming them is a sign of his respect and care, because when we are absorbed in God, forgetting everything else is the greatest sign of respect.

Rumi brings this up because he senses that his visitors struggled with something during the silence. They could not find what they were seeking. It was also a little strange for them to enter a room with other people, even friends, and sit down without a word being spoken. Formalities of social life, such as how we greet others can distract us during contemplation. We might try to move our attention to the formless reality, yet little thoughts like this intrude.

What Rumi is doing is dissolving these subtle worries of the mind, and thereby showing a technique. Look deeply into even the most mundane worldly customs and discover the real essence behind them. For example, the true reason for greeting others is concern for their spiritual honor. By looking closely at the origins of these traditions we can trace them back to their source in God. This aligns these thoughts with the inner truth and helps focus our being.

Someone then asks if there are greater ways of approaching God than through prayer.

Rather than letting this question take Rumi in a new direction, he uses it to continue the lesson he just started: Outer forms of society and religion are like a body. Rituals and greetings are cloaks housing a greater truth. God is the formless and living Reality behind everything.

The inner soul of prayer, therefore, takes us from the form and body to the formless. Can you see how this is the same technique he was just hinting at?

The true direction of Mecca is not a physical direction; it means facing the Light of God. Those who stop at the outer form, without realizing it, are turning their backs on that Light because they are not facing the real purpose of Mecca. They are bowing before an empty shell. They have lost the true meaning. It is the Reality of God that gave Mecca its place in Muslim teachings. That Reality is the real Mecca.

This might sound as if Rumi is suggesting breaking with Muslim practices of prayer and ritual, but that is not his point. He is saying that the only purpose for these outer forms is to lead us to absorption into the deepest spiritual worlds of God. Entering such ecstatic states, we forget and leave behind every outer form. Indeed, how is it even possible to remember anything else?

*I will no more remember myself. How, then, can I remember you?*

Rumi finishes with the story of a king and his devoted servant. The servant cannot maintain human consciousness in the presence of such beauty and grandeur. He falls down dumbfounded. The king then grants all the wishes of this servant. Those who retain their own minds, however, gain one out of a hundred desires.

One of the reasons Rumi tells this story is to show the importance of finding true lovers of God to help us on the spiritual path. But there is another hidden message: Rumi is revealing a spiritual exercise to his students. He is showing them how to attain the formless Reality that is the soul of prayer.

Let go of all your cares. Forget all worldly concerns. Return the many subtle human desires back to their source, and in that moment when you can think of nothing else—that is when everything is granted. You don't need to carry your worries to God. When all else is forgotten but God, It blesses even the smallest desires we have.

From the beginning to the end of this discourse, Rumi was teaching spiritual exercises to his students.

# Four

SOMEONE SAYS: "There is something I have forgotten."

Rumi replies: There is one thing in this world that must never be forgotten. If you were to forget all else, but did not forget that, then you would have no reason to worry. But if you performed and remembered everything else, yet forgot that one thing, then you would have done nothing whatsoever.

It is just as if a king sent you to the country to carry out a specific task. If you go and accomplish a hundred other tasks, but do not perform that one task, then it is as though you performed nothing at all. So, everyone comes into this world for a particular task, and that is their purpose. If they do not perform it, then they will have done nothing.

All things are assigned a task. The heavens send rain and light for the herbs of the field to germinate and spring into life. The earth receives the seeds and bears fruit, it accepts and reveals a hundred thousand marvels too numerous to tell. The mountains give forth mines of gold and silver. All these things the heavens, the earth, and the mountains do, yet they do not perform that one thing; that particular task is performed by us.

> *"We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, they refused to carry it and were afraid of it, but humans carried it. Surely they are foolish and sinful."*

So, people are given a task, and when they perform it all their sinfulness and foolishness are dissolved.

You say, "Even if I do not perform that task, look at all the work I accomplish." You weren't created for those other tasks! It is just as if you were given a sword of priceless Indian steel, such as can only be found in the treasuries of kings, and you were to treat it as a butcher's knife for cutting up putrid meat, saying, "I am not letting this sword stand idle, I am using it in many useful ways." Or it is like taking a solid gold bowl to cook turnips in, when a single grain of that gold could buy a hundred pots. Or it is as if you took a Damascene dagger of the finest temper to hang a broken gourd from, saying, "I am making good use of it. I am hanging a gourd on it. I am not letting this dagger go to waste." How foolish that would be! The gourd can hang perfectly well from a wooden or iron nail whose value is a mere pittance, so why use a dagger worth its weight in gold?

A poet once said:

*You are more precious than heaven and earth.*
*What more can I say?*
*You do not know your own worth.*

God says, "I will buy you, your moments, your breaths, your possessions, your lives. Spend them on Me. Turn them over to Me, and their price is divine freedom, grace and wisdom. This is your worth in My eyes." But if we keep our life for ourselves, then we lose what treasures we have been granted. Like the person who hammered the dagger worth its weight in gold to the wall in order to hang a gourd: Their great fortune was reduced to a nail.

Still you offer another excuse, saying, "But I apply myself to lofty tasks. I study law, philosophy, logic, astronomy, medicine and the rest." Well, for whose sake but your own do you study these? If it is law, it is so nobody can steal a loaf from you, strip you of your clothes, or kill you—in short, it is for your own security. If it is astronomy, the phases of the spheres and their influence upon the earth, whether they are light or heavy, portending tranquility or danger, all these things concern your own situation, serve your own ends. If it is medicine, it relates to your own health and also serves you. When you consider this matter well, the root of all your studies is yourself. All these lofty tasks are but branches of you.

If these subjects are filled with so many marvels and worlds of knowledge without end, consider what worlds you pass through who are the root! If your branches have their laws, their medicines, their histories, think of what transpires within you who are the source: What spiritual laws and medicines affect your inward future and fate? What histories portray your struggles of the heart?

For Soul there is other food besides this food of sleeping and eating, but you have forgotten that other food. Night and day you nourish only your body. Now, this body is like a horse, and this lower world is its stable. Food the horse eats is not food of the rider. You are the rider and have your own sleeping and eating, your own enjoyment. But since the animal has the upper hand, you lag behind in the horse's stable. You cannot be found among the ranks of kings and princes in the eternal world. Your heart is there, but since your body has the upper hand, you are subject to its rule and remain its prisoner.

When Majnun, as the story goes, was making for his beloved Laila's home, as long as he was fully conscious he drove his camel in that direction. But when for a moment he became absorbed in the thought of Laila and forgot his camel, the camel turned in its tracks toward the village where its foal was kept. On coming to his senses, Majnun found that he had gone back a distance of two day's journey. For three months he continued this way, coming no closer to his goal. Finally he jumped off the camel, saying, "This camel is the ruin of me!" and continued on foot, singing:

*My camel's desire is now behind,*
*My own desire is before.*
*Our purposes were crossed,*
*We can agree no more.*

Burhan al-Din was once greeted by someone, who said, "I have heard praises of you sung by friends." Burhan al-Din answered, "Wait until I meet your friends to see whether they know me well enough to praise me. If they know me only by word of mouth, then they do not truly know me. For words do not endure. Syllables and sounds do not endure. This body, these lips, and this mouth will not endure. All these things are mere accidents of the moment. But if they know me by my works and they know my essential self, then I know they are able to praise me, and that praise will go where it belongs."

This is like the story they tell of a certain king. This king entrusted his son to a team of learned scholars. In due course, they taught him the sciences of astrology, geomancy, and the interpretation of signs, until he became a complete master, despite his utter stupidity and dullness of wit.

One day the king took a ring in his fist and put his son to the test.

"Come, tell me what I am holding in my fist."

"What you are holding is round, yellow, inscribed and hollow," the prince answered.

"You have given all the signs correctly," the king said. "Now say what it is."

"It must be a sieve." the prince replied.

"What?" cried the king. "You know all the minute details, which would baffle the minds of anyone. How is it that out of all your powerful learning and knowledge, the small point has escaped you that a sieve will not fit in a fist?"

In this same way, the great scholars of the age split hairs on details of all matters. They know perfectly and completely those sciences that do not concern Soul. But as for what is truly of importance and touches us more closely than anything else, namely our own Self, this your great scholars do not know. They make statements about everything, saying, "This is true and that is not true. This is right and that is wrong." Yet, they do not know their own Self, whether it is true or false, pure or impure.

Now being hollow and yellow, inscribed and circular, these features are accidental; cast the ring into the fire and none of them will remain. It becomes its essential self, purified of all appearances. So it is with the knowledge of scholars; what they know has no connection with the essential reality that alone exists when all these "signs" are gone. They speak wisely, expound at great length, and finally pronounce that what the king has in his hand is a sieve. They have no knowledge about the root of the matter: life's purpose.

I am a bird. I am a nightingale. If they say to me, "Make some other kind of sound," I cannot. My tongue is what it is. I cannot speak otherwise. However, those who learn the song of birds are not birds themselves—on the contrary, they are the enemies of birds and their captors. They sing and whistle to be mistaken for birds. Ask them to produce a different sound and they do it, because the sound is merely assumed by them. It is not truly their own. Like the scholars, they are able to sing other songs because they have learned to rob those songs, and to show off a different tune stolen from every breast.

## COMMENTARY

Once again, an apparently casual comment becomes the focus of Rumi's lesson. Indeed, it leads us into the heart of his teaching.

We have forgotten.

We have forgotten one thing so important that it makes all else insignificant.

But what is that one thing? Rumi does not say.

He does not declare what it is, but he tells us that it is so important it cannot be carried by the earth or the mountains. Only human beings can bear it, and when we recognize and accept this task then all our sins and foolishness are turned aright. Everything in life makes sense in relationship once we remember this purpose.

Rumi gives us another clue:

> *God says, "I will buy you, your moments, your breaths, your possessions, your lives. Spend them on Me. Turn them over to Me, and their price is divine freedom, grace and wisdom. This is your worth in My eyes."*

When we think about ourselves, worry over our needs, or work for our own gains, we lose the divine freedom, grace, and wisdom that God has granted us. We become just a creature driven by our desires like any other animal on this planet. We forget our birthright and the meaning of our lives. We do not recognize our true value. Our life becomes like a valuable Damascene dagger used to hold a worthless gourd.

Clearly, this One Thing is at the core of who we are and why we are here, but Rumi will not say what it is. In fact, he criticizes those who act as if they can publicly state it:

> *They make statements about everything, saying, "This is true and that is not true. This is right and that is wrong." Yet, they do not know their own Self, whether it is true or false, pure or impure.*

Think about how often we hear people trying to tell us The Answer. They speak as if possessing great knowledge and authority and they tell everyone the great Answer, but their words do not fit.

> *They speak wisely, expound at great length, and finally pronounce that what the king has in his hand is a sieve. They have no knowledge about the root of the matter: life's purpose.*

Rumi is a different kind of spiritual teacher. He cannot preach dogma. He cannot give out doctrines. He has heard the criticisms against him, but he cannot change who he is.

> *If they say to me, "Make some other kind of sound," I cannot. My tongue is what it is. I cannot speak otherwise.*

He cannot tell people the Answer, because he knows those kinds of answers are not what they seem. They are songs stolen from real birds, meaning true spiritual lovers. They are songs that have been robbed and then are used to mimic and pretend and lure people away from asking the silent questions.

Why are we here? Who are we?

These are the questions we must never forget, because the answers are something we must awaken to.

This awakening is nothing less than God's embrace, and it is here where we find our own song.

It is a song that only we can sing.

# Five

THE AMIR, surprised by an unexpected visit from Rumi, says: “Master, how gracious of you to honor me in this way. I never expected this. It never entered my mind that I could be worthy of such an honor. By rights I should be standing night and day in the ranks and company of your servants and attendants. I’m not even worthy of that. How gracious this is!”

Rumi says: It is all because of your lofty spiritual aspirations. The higher and greater your rank and the more you become occupied with important, exalted worldly affairs, the more you consider yourself to have fallen short of your spiritual purpose. You are not satisfied with what you have achieved, thinking that you have too many obligations. Since none of these attainments can blind you from that divine attainment, my heart is moved to serve you. And yet for all that, still, I wanted to pay you formal honor as well.

Form too possesses great importance. No, much more than importance—it is of true substance. Just as the body will fail if it lacks a heart, so too it fails without a skin. If you plant a seed with no husk, it cannot grow, but if you bury it in the earth with its shell, then it germinates and becomes a great tree. So, form is a great and necessary principle, and without it our task fails and our purpose is not attained. Yes, this principle is reality in the eyes of those who know reality and have become reality!

A dervish once entered the presence of a king. The king addressed him, "Oh, ascetic."

"You are the ascetic," the dervish answered.

"How can I be an ascetic," the king demanded, "since the whole world belongs to me?"

"Ah, you see things the opposite of what they are," replied the dervish. "This world and the next and all that there is to possess, these all belong to me. I have seized the whole world. It is you who have become satisfied with a mouthful and a rag."

Wherever you turn—there is the Face of God. This Face runs and extends infinitely and forever. True spiritual lovers have sacrificed themselves for the sake of that Face, desiring nothing in return. The rest of the human race is like cattle.

Yet, even though they are cattle, still they deserve favor. They may be limited to living in the stable, yet they are accepted by the Lord of the stable. If He so desires, He transfers them from this stable into His private pen. So, in the beginning God brought men and women into existence and, then, transferred them from the pen of spiritual existence into the world inanimate. Then from the pen of the world inanimate into the vegetable world. Then, from vegetable into animal. From animal to human, human to angel, and so on forever. He manifested all these forms so that you would know His pens are many, and that each one is loftier than the next.

God revealed this present world so that you could accept the other stages that lie ahead. He did not reveal it so that you would say, "This is all there is."

The masters of crafts demonstrate their abilities and arts so their apprentices will find faith in them and will believe in the other arts they have not yet demonstrated. A king bestows robes of honor and lavishes kindness on his subjects because they look forward to receiving other gifts from him, and hang hopefully upon future purses of gold. He does not grant these things so that they will say, "This is all there is. The king will not give out any other blessings," to make do with that amount. If the king knows any subjects are going to say that and take such gifts for granted, he will never bestow any blessings whatsoever upon them.

The ascetic is one who sees the hereafter, while the worldling sees only the stable. But the chosen ones of God who have true knowledge see neither the hereafter nor the stable. Their eyes are fixed on the first principle, the source of all things. When the chosen ones sow wheat they know that wheat will grow, because they see the end from the beginning. It is the same with barley, rice and all things—seeing the beginning, their eyes are not fixed on the end. They know the conclusion from the start. Such men and women are rare.

It is pain that guides us in every enterprise. Until there is an ache within, a passion and a yearning for that thing arising within us, we will never strive to attain it. Without pain it remains beyond our reach, whether it is success in this world or salvation in the next, whether we aim at becoming a merchant or a king, a scientist or an astronomer. It was not until the pains of birth manifested in Mary that she made for the tree. Those pangs drove her to the tree, and the tree that was withered became fruitful.

We are like that story of Mary in the Koran. Every one of us has a Jesus within, but until the pangs manifest, our Jesus is not born. If the pangs never come, then our child returns to its origin by the same secret path through which it came, leaving us empty, without the birth of our true self.

*Your inward soul is hungry.*
*Your outward flesh is overfed.*
*The devil has gorged to sickness.*
*The king begs even for bread.*
*The cure is found while Jesus is here on earth!*
*But once he returns to heaven, all hope will have fled.*

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# COMMENTARY

Rumi pays the Amir formal honor by visiting him, and then goes on to discuss the importance of form. We must not ignore it in our pursuit of spiritual truth. It possesses something vital and necessary for physical life. Therefore, it is important to also pay honor to the established structures of this world.

But, if this is true, then why does Rumi now tell the Amir the story of a king who has settled for a mere mouthful and a rag? Isn't saying such a thing to a king an act of dishonor? What does Rumi mean by telling this story to the Amir?

In this tale, the dervish speaking to the king knows that he is putting his life at risk by what he says, but there is nothing that he fears or desires from the king. In other words, Rumi has come to pay honor to the Amir, but desires nothing in return. Rumi's fortunes rest in God's hands alone, not in the powers of this world.

*True spiritual lovers have sacrificed themselves for the sake of that Face, desiring nothing in return.*

But what about the rest of mankind who hungers after the things of this world? These are people the Amir must work with every day. God may not favor them and grant them spiritual freedom as he does his true lovers, but he has not forgotten them. It is for these cattle that pens and outward authorities have been made. Step by step God moves them from one pen to the next for their own spiritual growth.

Rumi is revealing here, for the people of the thirteenth century, the incredible pattern of evolution and the hidden design behind it. It is for the sake of Soul's expanding awareness. This is why life takes on more and more refined and intelligent bodies, so that eventually it can realize this gift of life and see that it is leading to the realization of God.

Rumi could just as well be speaking to evolutionists of today when he says that God revealed this unfolding movement of life so that we could know what lies ahead.

*He did not reveal it so that you would say, "This is all there is."*

Modern scientists may not accept the idea that there is a spiritual impetus behind evolution, but even they realize that far more is possible in the development of life. The incredible complexities of living organisms that emerged and their interconnectedness prove that this is not the end—much more is possible. But where is it all heading? Not seeing the origins of evolution, they cannot see its end and purpose. Rare are those whose eyes are fixed upon the source.

*They know the conclusion from the start.*

They see the full and complete role of evolution, and they also realize that everything has been designed to lead Soul eventually to this understanding. This is the true purpose of the forms of this world.

However, it is pain and suffering that teaches us. We do not recognize the Jesus within us—meaning Soul our true self—without the pangs of desire and longing. We do not give up our creature habits that care only about the stable we live in until we follow the ache within for more. The anguish of restriction and the desire for freedom eventually set Soul on a spiritual quest.

Therefore, the forms of this world lead us step by step into a growing desire for what lies beyond all form. This is why all stations and positions deserve our honor and respect. Not because any worldly positions have authority over those who are true lovers of God, but because they too were fashioned by our Beloved for the sake of awakening Soul to its true potential.

# Six

RUMI SAYS: These words are for the sake of those who need words to understand. But as for those who understand without words, what use do they have for speech? The heavens and earth are words to them, sent forth from the Word of God. Whoever hears a whisper, what need do they have for shouting and screaming?

An Arabic-speaking poet once came into the presence of a king. Now the king was a Turk, but he did not know Arabic. The poet had composed some brilliant verses in his honor and brought these with him. When the king had taken his seat on the throne and the courtiers were all present and duly stationed, commanders and ministers each in their place, the poet rose to his feet and began to recite his poem. At every passage deserving applause the king nodded his head, while at every passage provoking astonishment he looked amazed. Similarly, he responded to every passage expressing submission. The courtiers were astounded.

"Our king doesn't know a word of Arabic," they murmured amongst themselves. "Then how could he know exactly when to nod his head? He must have known Arabic all these years and kept it hidden from us. If we ever uttered incivilities in Arabic, then woe is us!"

Now the king had a favorite slave. So, the courtiers assembled together and gave the slave a horse, a mule, a sum of money, and they promised to give him this much again. "Just find out whether or not the king knows Arabic," they said to him. "If he does not, how was it that he nodded at just the right places? Was it a miracle? Was it divine inspiration?"

Finally one day the slave found his opportunity. The king was out hunting, and the slave perceived that he was in a good mood since the hunt had gone well. So he asked the king point blank. The king burst out laughing.

"By Allah, I don't know Arabic," he said. "As for nodding and applauding, I knew of course what the poet's object was in composing that poem, and so I nodded and applauded."

So it was realized that the root of the matter was the purpose desired; the poem itself was merely a branch of that purpose. If it had not been for that purpose, the poet would never have composed his poem.

If our real goal is kept in view, duality vanishes. Duality shows the branches, but the root is one. It is the same with Sufi sheikhs. Although to outward appearance they have various styles of teaching and differ widely in their social standing, even in their action and words, yet from the standpoint of their purpose they all have one aim, namely the quest for God.

Take the case of the wind. When it blows through a house it lifts the edges of the carpet and the rugs flap and move about. It whisks sticks and straws into the air, ruffles the surface of the pool until it looks like a coat of mail, sets trees, twigs and leaves a-dancing. All those conditions appear distinct and different, yet from the standpoint of the principle, the root, and reality, they are one thing—the movement of the wind.

Someone says: "I have neglected that true purpose."

Rumi replies: When this thought enters a person's mind and they criticize themself, asking, "What am I about, and why do I do these things?" this is sure proof that God loves them and cares for them.

"Love continues so long as reprimands continue," said the poet. We may chide our friends, but we never chastise a stranger.

Now there are levels of reprimand. When a person is stung by it and sees the truth in it, that is a sign that God loves them and cares for them. But if the scolding flies by that person without causing any pain at all, then this is no sign of love. When a carpet is beaten to get rid of the dust, intelligent people do not call that punishment. But if a woman beats her own darling child, then that is called punishment and is a proof of her love. Therefore, as long as you find pain and regret within yourself, that is proof of God's love and guidance.

If you find fault in your brother or sister, the fault you see in them is within yourself. The true Sufi is like a mirror that reflects your own image, for:

> *"The believer is a mirror of their fellow believers."*

Get rid of those faults in yourself, because what bothers you in them bothers you in yourself.

An elephant was led to a well to drink. Seeing itself in the water, it shied away. It thought it was shying away from another elephant. It did not realize it was shying away from its own self.

All evil qualities—hatred, envy, oppression, greed, mercilessness, pride—when they are within yourself, they bring no pain. When you see them in another, then you shy away and feel pain. We feel no disgust at our own scab and abscess. We will dip our infected hand into our food and lick our fingers without turning in the least bit squeamish. But if we see a tiny abscess or half a scratch on another's hand, we shy away from that person's food and have no stomach for it whatsoever. Evil qualities are just like scabs and abscesses; when they are within us they cause no anguish, but when we see them even to a small degree in another, then we feel agony and disgust.

Just as you shy away from your brother or sister, so you should excuse them for shying away from you. The pain you feel comes from those faults, and they see the same faults. The seeker of truth is a mirror for their neighbors. But those who cannot feel the sting of truth are not mirrors to anyone but themselves.

A certain king was sitting, dejected, on the bank of a river. The generals were nervous and afraid of him. His face would not clear up no matter what they tried. Now he had a jester whom he treated as a great favorite. The generals promised the jester a certain sum of money if he could make the king laugh. So the jester approached the king, but despite all his efforts the king would not so much as look at him. The king kept staring into the river and did not lift his head at all.

"What do you see in the water?" the jester asked the king.

"I see the husband of an unfaithful wife," the king replied.

"King of the world," the jester said, "your slave is also not blind."

So it is in your own case. If you see something in your fellow that pains you, after all, they also are not blind. They see exactly what you see.

In God's presence two I's cannot exist. You cannot know your self and God's Self. Either die before God, or God will die before you so that duality no longer remains. But as for God's dying, that is both impossible and inconceivable, for God is the Living, the Immortal. So gracious is He that if it were at all possible He would die for your sake. Since that is not possible, then you must die so that God can reveal Himself to you, and duality can vanish.

Tie two birds together, and despite their familiarity and the fact that their two wings have been changed to four, they cannot fly because they are two. But let one bird give up its life and the other—even though tied to the first—can fly, because duality has vanished.

Shams-i-Tabriz was a servant of God who had the power to sacrifice himself for the sake of a friend. He prayed to God for that friend, but God would not accept his petition. "I do not want you to help him," came a voice. Shams, that son of the Sun [Shams-i-Tabriz means literally Sun of Tabriz,] persisted and would not cease his requests, saying, "O God, you have implanted this desire for him, and it will not leave me." Finally a voice came saying, "Do you desire that this should come to pass? Then sacrifice yourself, and become nothing. Do not wait and leave this world behind." "Lord," Shams answered, "I am content." So he did; he gambled away his life for the sake of that Friend, and his desire was accomplished.

If a servant of God can possess such grace as to sacrifice his life, of which one day's portion is worth the life of all the world from first to last, does not the Source of that grace also possess this love? It would be absurd to think otherwise. But since it is not possible for God to pass away, at least you can.

A fool came and sat in a seat above one of the great saints. What difference does it make to the saints whether such a person is above or below the lamp? If the lamp wants to be on high, it does not desire that for its own sake. Its purpose is for the benefit of others, so they can enjoy their share of the light. Wherever the lamp may be, whether below or above, it is still the lamp of the Eternal Sun. If the saint seeks worldly rank and office, it is for this purpose: They desire to snare those worldlings who do not have the vision to see their true elevation, with a trap of worldly rank. Through this they may find their way to the higher worlds and fall into the trap of divine grace.

In this same way, the Prophet, Mohammad, did not conquer Mecca and the surrounding lands because he was in need of them. He conquered in order to give life and grant light to all people.

*"This is a hand accustomed to give; it is not accustomed to take."*

The saints beguile people in order to bestow gifts on them, not to take anything away.

When someone lays a trap and catches little birds to eat and sell, that is called cunning. But if a king lays a trap to capture an untutored and worthless hawk, having no knowledge of its own true nature, to train it to his own forearm so that it may become ennobled, that is not called cunning. Though to outward appearance it is cunning, yet it is known to be the very acme of caring and generosity, restoring the dead to life, converting the base stone into a ruby, and far more than that. If the hawk knew for what reason the king wanted to capture it, it would not require any bait. It would search for the trap with heart and soul and would fly to the king's hand.

People only listen to the outward significance of the saints' words. They say, "We've heard plenty of this. Our hearts are stuffed full with words of this kind." God says, "God forbid that you should be full of them! You are full of your own whisperings and vain conceits. You are full of illusion and greed. Nay, you are full of cursing."

If only they were emptied of such ravings! Then they would be open to receive these words. But they are not interested in receiving them. God has set a seal upon their ears and eyes and hearts. Their eyes see things the opposite of what they are. They hear wisdom as gibberish and raving. Their hearts have been transformed into a home of self-love and vanity. A winter's tangle of dark shapes and pride has possessed them. Their hearts are hardened with ice and frost.

> *"God has set a seal on their hearts and their hearing, and on their eyes is a covering."*

How likely is it that people like this could be full of these true words? They have never caught so much as a whiff of them. They have never tasted a drop in all their lives—neither they nor those they worship, nor their miserable household. God shows a pitcher to everyone. To some It shows a pitcher filled with water, and they drink until they are sated. But to some God shows it as empty. What thanks can anyone give for an empty pitcher? Only those whom God shows it as full can find thanks for this gift.

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## COMMENTARY:

Only those who understand without words know the true spiritual reality. But what use do such beings have for speech if they can hear the Word of God, the spiritual sound current that springs forth from the heart of reality? All of Life speaks to them directly, without thoughts or words.

> *Whoever hears a whisper, what need have they for shouting and screaming?*

All of the holy books, sacred scriptures, and religious teachings take on a cloak of duality through words. These words may speak of Truth, but they are not the Truth they speak of. Such sayings are given for the sake of those who need words to understand.

The meaning of words is contained in their purpose. If we know that, we can truly understand them. But Rumi is not just referring to the intentions of writers and authors, but the original purpose behind God's expression of Life. All of language, all thoughts and words derive from this First Intent.

If you understand that, then you will understand Life like an open book.

To attain such a state of consciousness, our little self must die before God. Only after we have given up trying to advance spiritually by our own efforts alone do we experience the path unfolding before us. The illusion of duality must disappear before we can know how to fly upon the wings of our higher self, because these are God's wings.

Rumi tells the story of Shams-i-Tabriz and his desire to sacrifice his life for the sake of a friend. The friend in this story is Rumi himself. The moment they first met, he saw in Shams a great ocean of God. Shams saw in Rumi the first worthy student for him to teach. However, to Rumi's followers, Shams was an unknown rogue Sufi, almost wild in his manners, while Rumi was already famous as a teacher. It made no sense to them that Rumi would be so taken in by Shams. Some of them became jealous of Shams, who was occupying all of Rumi's time. They began to imagine he put Rumi under some kind of spell. Thinking they were saving their beloved teacher, they threatened to kill Shams and chased him away.

But Rumi sent his son to bring Shams back, and after much pleading he eventually returned, knowing that he was putting his life at risk for the sake of his friend. Soon after Shams returned, complaints started up against him again. This time he told Rumi's students that he would disappear and no one would ever be able to find him again, and that is exactly what happened. Rumi searched for the missing

Shams for years, only to stop one day when he realized that the One he sought was within himself.

Rumi dedicated one of his two great works of poetry to Shams. Here are the opening lines[7]:

*If you are Love's lover and seek Love,*
*Take a sharp blade and cut this throat of bashfulness.*
*Reputation is a great hindrance on the path.*
*This truth is without self-interest—receive it with a pure mind.*

*Why did that madman work madness in a thousand forms?*
*That chosen wild one who displayed a thousand wiles?*
*He tore robes and sped over mountains.*
*He sipped poison and chose death....*

*It is not right to beat a drum under a quilt.*
*Plant your banner in the midst of this desert, like a brave man.*
*Listen with Soul's ear to the endless Sounds within the hollow of this green dome,*
*Rising like lovers' passionate cries....*

*I am silent. It is You who speak.*
*You, who are the Soul of the Soul of Soul.*
*Desire for Your face has caused every atom to become articulate.*

As I said before, the discourses of Rumi unlock the meaning behind many of his poems. But Rumi's poetry is at times almost unfathomable in its depths. When reading the above, think of the first four lines as if Shams was speaking, exhorting Rumi to share his teachings. The second group of four lines show Rumi's awe as he speaks in amazement about Shams. The third section is once again Shams' inner teaching coaxing Rumi to teach openly. Rumi ends by declaring that these are not his words, but Shams' words. Shams, for Rumi, is that Consciousness that carries the whole of the teachings. From this, Rumi realizes this Consciousness within himself, knowing he cannot forget from where it came.

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[7] Modified from *Selected Poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz*, edited by R. A. Nicholson, Cambridge University Press, London, 1977, pages 3–7

Seeing this story of Shams, we can now see why Rumi goes on to say that some Sufi sheikhs hold a higher position and others lower, but this means nothing to lovers of Truth. He is referring to the differences between Shams, himself and others.

Spiritual teachers are each different. Their methods and actions vary widely. Some teach secretly or to just a close few. Others take positions of prominence for the sake of sharing the light they have been given. It means nothing more to them than this. From the standpoint of duality, they seem to be at odds with each other. But their goals are all the same—the quest for Truth. So, in reality they are all one teaching.

Such paradoxes exist because it is impossible to communicate the whole of Life through words. So the path unfolds step by step. Each stage has its own lessons, but how can we know the true value and purpose before we arrive? We are like hawks scavenging in the rubbish until we fall under the grace of those who know our nobility and royal nature better than we do ourselves.

On the other hand, there are those who say they have had their fill of religion. They have read the writings of spiritual teachers and feel stuffed full of them, when in fact they haven't even tasted a morsel of real truth. What fills them is their own duality, their own separateness. They see reflections of their own vanity projected onto others. It is like a seal over their eyes and ears. How can we blame them for rejecting words that seem empty to them?

*Only those whom God shows it as full can find thanks for this gift.*

# Seven

THE SON OF THE AMIR ENTERS.

Rumi says: Your father is always occupied with God. His faith is overwhelming and reveals itself in his words. One day your father said, "The people of Rum have urged me to give my daughter in marriage to the Tartars, so that our religion may become one, and this new religion of Muslimdom can disappear."

I said, "When has religion ever been one? There have always been two or three, and they have always had war and fighting between them. How do you expect to make religion one? It will be one only in the next world, at the resurrection. As for this present world, it isn't possible here, for here each religion has a different desire and design. Here unity is impossible. It will be possible only at the resurrection when humanity becomes one and all people fix their eyes on one place and all have one ear and one tongue."

Within us are many things. There is mouse in us, and there is bird. The bird carries the cage upwards, while the mouse drags it down. A hundred thousand different wild beasts are together within us, but they are all converging on that moment when the mouse will renounce its mousehood and the bird its birdhood, and all become one. For the goal is neither going up or down. When the goal shows itself clearly, it will be neither above nor below.

A woman losses something. She looks left and right, in front and behind. Once she finds that thing she no longer searches above and below, left and right, in front or behind. All at once she becomes calm and collected. Similarly, on the resurrection day all people will be of one eye, tongue, ear, and understanding.

When ten friends share a garden or a shop in common, they speak as one, they plan as one, and their work is with one thing since their objective is the same. So, on the resurrection day, since the affair of all will be with God, they will all be one.

In this world everyone is preoccupied with a separate affair. One is in love with women, one is in love with wealth, another is engaged in acquiring possessions, another in acquiring knowledge. Everyone believes that their cure, their joy, their pleasure and comfort can be found in that one thing. And that is a Divine mercy, because when they search they cannot find, and so they return. After they have waited a while, they say again, "That joy and pleasure must be searched for. Perhaps I didn't look hard enough. I will try again." Then they look again, but still they cannot find their desire. So they continue until that time when Truth removes Its veil. Then they know.

But God has certain servants who know even before the resurrection. Ali [cousin and son-in-law of Mohammad] said, "Even if the veil was removed, my faith would not increase." That is to say, "Even when the body is gone and the resurrection appears, my certainty can become no greater." This is like a group of people at prayer on a dark night; they turn their faces in every direction, being unable to see. When day comes they all turn themselves around, except for that one individual who through the night was facing towards Mecca. Why should that individual turn around? So, those special servants of God keep their faces towards the One even in the night, and have turned their faces away from all else. Therefore, for them, the resurrection is already manifest and present.

There is no end to words, but they are given according to the capacity of the seeker.

Wisdom is like the rain. Its supply is unlimited, but it comes down according to what the occasion requires—in winter and spring, in summer and autumn, always in due measure, more or less; but the source of that rain is the ocean itself, which has no limits. Druggists put sugar or drugs in a twist of paper, but sugar is not limited by the amount in the paper. The stocks of sugar and the stocks of drugs are unlimited and unbounded; how can a piece of paper contain them?

Some people uttered taunts at Mohammad, saying, "Why does the Koran come down upon you word by word? Why not chapter by chapter?" Mohammad answered, "What do these fools say? If it were to come down upon me all at once, I would dissolve and vanish away."

Those who truly understand a little understand much—of one thing, many things—of one line, whole volumes. It is like when a group is seated listening to a story, but one woman knows all the circumstances, having been there when it occurred. From the first hint she understands it all. She turns pale, then crimson, changing from one feeling to another. The others understand only as much as they hear, since they do not know what really happened. But the one who knows understands the whole story from even a few words.

To return: When you come to the druggist, they have sugar in abundance. But they see how much money you brought and give accordingly. By "money" is meant sincerity and belief. The words are imparted according to one's sincerity and belief. When you come seeking sugar, they examine your bag to see what its capacity is, then they measure out accordingly, one bushel or two. But if someone brings a string of camels, they call the weigh-men to help.

So, someone comes along whom oceans do not satisfy; another finds a few drops enough and any more would be harmful.

This applies not only to the world of ideas, sciences and wisdom. It is true of everything. Property, wealth, gold, all are unbounded and infinite, but they are imparted according to the capacity of the individual. Who could support an endless supply without being driven mad? Do you not see how Majnun and Farhad and the other famous lovers took to the mountain and desert for the love of a woman when they were filled with a passion beyond their power to control? Do you not see how Pharaoh, when empire and wealth were showered upon him without end, laid claim to being a god?

Yes, indeed these people have faith, but they do not know what that faith is in. In the same way, children have faith that they will have bread to eat, but they don't know where bread comes from. It is the same with all things that grow. A tree turns yellow and dry of thirst, but it doesn't know what thirst really is.

Our faith is like a flag. First we set the flag fluttering in the air to proclaim our belief and, then, send troops to the foot of that flag from every direction to support and defend it. We send reason, understanding, fury and anger, forbearance and liberality, fear and hope, on and on without end. Whoever looks from afar sees only the flag, but those who see from close at hand know the essences and realities that reside within us.

Someone comes in and Rumi says: Where have you been? We have been longing to see you. Why have you stayed away?

The visitor replies, "It was just how things conspired."

Rumi says: We, for our part, have been praying that this conspiracy of things might come to an end. A conspiracy of things that produces separation is an improper conspiracy. Yes, by Allah, it, too, comes from God, and in relation to God it, too, is good. It is a true saying, that all things are good and perfect in relation to God, but in relation to us, how can this be true? Fornication and purity, avoiding prayer and praying, unbelief and Islam, idolatry and God's unity—with God all these are good. But to us, fornication and thieving, unbelief and idolatry are bad, while God's unity and prayer are good. Even though in relation to God all are good.

A king has in his realm prisons and gallows, robes of honor and wealth, estates and attendants in waiting, feasting and celebration, drums and flags. In relation to the king all these things are good. Just as robes of honor are the perfect flourish for his kingdom, in the same way gallows and prisons are perfect ornaments. In relation to him all these things are perfect, but in relation to his people how could robes of honor and the gallows be one and the same?

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## COMMENTARY:

Imagine sitting before Rumi and hearing him say that wisdom is given out according to the capacity of the listener.

Doesn't this nudge you to ask yourself what substance you possess?

He then looks around to each of us and says that when you come to the spiritual path, you will be examined to see how much sincerity and understanding you have brought, and then the teaching will be weighed out according to your capacity.

> *So, someone comes along whom oceans do not satisfy;*
> *another finds a few drops enough and any more would be*
> *harmful.*

Doesn't this cause us to look within ourselves? What will we find: The limitless depths within us that Rumi sees? Or will we sense shallowness? Will we come up short?

Do these inner questions inspire you to strive for substance? Will Rumi's words awaken within you the recognition of something deep inside that knows what he is saying, even if your mind cannot fully understand? Does this spark a growing realization of the spiritual hunger within you?

Or, does the feeling of Rumi looking into our hearts remind us of the façades we've hidden behind? Do we try to avoid the gaze of someone who sees right through us?

Is it now easier to understand why some students might want to stay away for a while? How did that student feel after returning, when Rumi asked him why he had been gone for so long? Wasn't Rumi trying to show him the importance of overcoming these inner conspiracies that keep us from fully embracing Truth? Isn't the reality of our true capacity the wisdom we long to know?

Rumi is explaining here something that few ever realize: The goal is not up or down. It is not about being good or bad, greater or lesser. We have both depth and shallowness in our lives. Our nature is made up of the mouse that crawls to the lowest levels and the bird that flies into the heights. It is natural to have all of these forces within us. They all exist as parts of us.

What Rumi is describing is the one thing that brings them all together. That is what we are looking for.

Once our face turns toward the Source of life, when the light and sound of God fill us, all these different desires dissolve into one purpose. The mouse no longer pulls down the cage, but inspires the bird to fly higher. Our shallowness no longer causes us to sneak away, but brings a deeper understanding to the whole of who we are.

> *. . . the one who knows understands the whole story from even a few words.*

This is the true nature of Soul. We are oceans without limit, but we have forgotten our limitless capacity.

# Eight

SOMEONE ASKS: "What is greater than prayer?"

Rumi says: One answer is that the soul of prayer is greater than prayer, as I have already explained. A second answer is that belief is greater. Prayer is a series of daily actions, while belief is continuous. Prayer can be dropped for a valid excuse or can be postponed, but it is impossible to drop or postpone our belief for any reason. And where prayer without belief gains nothing, as in the case of hypocrites, belief without prayer is valuable. Another point: while the prayer of every religion is different, belief itself does not change from religion to religion. The states that it produces, its place in life, and its effects are the same everywhere.

There are other advantages to belief, but their discovery depends upon the listener's ability to absorb and draw them in. Each listener is like flour in the hands of a dough-maker. Words are like water sprinkled on flour according to the moisture needed. But unless the water soaks in, it cannot make dough. A poet said:

*My eye is fixed upon another,*
*What shall I do?*
*Look to yourself, for that eye's light is you.*

"My eye is fixed upon another." This means you are seeking something apart from yourself, like the dryness of flour that longs for water from the dough-maker's hand. "What can I do?" Know that you seek only yourself; that longing is for you. The light you seek is your own light reflected, but you will not escape this blinding glare of outer lights until your own Inner Light becomes a hundred thousand times greater.

There was once a skinny person, feeble as a sparrow, and exceedingly ugly. He was so ugly that even other ugly people looked on him with contempt and gave thanks to God, though before seeing him they used to complain of their own ugliness. Yet, for all that, he was very rude in his way of speaking and bragged enormously. He was in the court of the king and his behavior pained the vizier, but the vizier swallowed it down. Then one day the vizier lost his temper.

"People of the court," he shouted. "I picked this creature out of the gutter and nourished him. By eating my bread and sitting at my table, by enjoying my charity and my wealth, and that of my ancestors, he became somebody. Now he has reached the point of saying such things to me!"

"People of the court," cried the man, springing up in the vizier's face, "and nobles and pillars of the state! What he says is quite true. I was nourished by his wealth and charity and that of his ancestors until I grew up, contemptible and crude as you see me. If I had been nourished by someone else's bread and wealth, surely my appearance, my manners and my worth would have been better than this. He picked me out of the gutter; but all I can say is, 'Oh, I wish that I were dust.' If someone else had picked me out of the gutter, I would not have been such a laughing stock."

The disciple who eats at the table of a lover of God has a clean and true spirit. But those who are nourished by the hands of an impostor and a braggart, learning the science from them, become just like their teacher, contemptible and feeble, weak and unable to make up their minds about anything.

Within our being all sciences were originally joined as one. Our spirit once displayed all hidden things, like clear water shows everything within it—pebbles, broken shards and the like—and reflects the sky above from its surface like a mirror. This is Soul's true nature, without treatment or training. But after Soul mingles with the earth and its earthly elements, this clarity leaves it and is forgotten.

So God sends forth the prophets and saints like a great translucent ocean that accepts all waters, and yet no matter how dark or dirty are the rivers that pour into it, that ocean remains pure. Then Soul remembers. When it sees its reflection in that unsullied water, it knows for sure that in the beginning it, too, was pure, and these shadows and colors are mere accidents.

The prophets and the saints, therefore, remind us of our original state; they do not implant anything new. Now, any water, no matter how dark, that recognizes that great water, saying, "I come from this and I belong to this," is truly a part of that ocean. But the dark elements that do not recognize that ocean and believe they are kin to another kind, they make their home with the colors and shadows of the earth.

It was for this reason that the Prophet said, "Now there comes to you a Messenger from amongst yourselves." In other words, the great ocean is that same substance as your own water, it is all from one self and one source. But for those elements that do not feel the attraction of familiarity, this failure does not come from the water itself, but from the pollution in that water. This pollution is mixed in so closely that the water does not know whether its own shying away from the ocean comes from itself, or from the essence of that pollution. And so, evil men do not know whether their attraction toward evil springs from their own nature, or from some dark element mingled in.

Every line of poetry the saints and prophets bring forth, every tradition, every verse they write, is like a witness bearing testimony. They bear witness to each situation according to its nature. In the same way we have two witnesses at the inheritance of a house, two witnesses at the sale of a shop, two witnesses at a marriage. So too, the saints bear witness. The inner form of their testimony is always the same; it is the outer meaning that differs. I pray that God may cause these words to bear witness to God and you alike.

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## COMMENTARY

When Rumi speaks of belief, he means something inherent and essential within us, not the thoughts and theories we adopt. He is referring to an inner activity we cannot drop. It never leaves. It is always at work within us, shaping our lives and what we see.

Battles over which worldview is right prevent people from seeing that belief, of itself, is a part of all men and women, no matter who they are. Everyone believes. It is impossible to stop believing. Even skeptics that question and doubt every idea, including belief itself, are acting from what they believe.

Without the inner ground of belief, all philosophies come to nothing. They are empty and without life. Modern day thinkers criticize beliefs for this very reason, saying they are relative to the believer and therefore have no substance of themselves. Christian children grow up accepting the Christian ideals of their parents. Hindu children and Muslim children do exactly the same. But what is overlooked is that these beliefs are only viewpoints—these are only lenses of perception through which people see the world.

But belief of itself, the essence that Rumi is talking about, is the universal capacity of seeing life. It is something always at work within us, continuously recognizing Spirit.

Therefore, it is this inescapable inner quality that is greater than religious prayer and teachings. It is the key to inspiration and understanding. It is the wind that fills the sails of our life and carries us on its breath.

But if we never draw that element into our lungs, if we never let it fill us and move us, then we are cut off from its power to transform life.

> *There are other advantages to belief, but their discovery depends upon the listener's ability to absorb and draw them in.*

This is not about adopting a new way of seeing. People continue to search for new perspectives that can encompass all of life. But the belief that Rumi is talking about is not something we need to learn. It is something we already know. It is something we already do. It is an element within us that sees the whole of things.

> *The prophets and the saints, therefore, remind us of our original state; they do not implant anything new.*

Remember the story of Mohammad who had an inner ear that could recognize the snapping of the girdle of doubt? We, too, can recognize the ring of truth when we hear it. It is an inherent sense within us because we too are made of that same truth. It is a song that resonates with us because we are built attuned to the same reality. This is belief without words or names.

> *The light you seek is your own light reflected, but you will not escape this blinding glare of outer lights until your own Inner Light becomes a hundred thousand times greater.*

It is not necessary to search for Spirit—everything is filled with it. It is the capacity of our belief that allows us to be a witness. All spiritual teachings are testaments of this truth. But the ability to see truth requires longing, just as dough is only made from flour that yearns for water. It is when we discover a desire to be fashioned and baked by the dough-maker that we recognize what we are really made of: Belief.

# Nine

ONE OF RUMI'S STUDENTS SAYS: "A man came who wanted to see you. He kept saying, 'I wish I could have seen the Master.'"

Rumi says: He does not see the Master at this moment because in truth the desire that filled him, namely to see the Master, was a veil hiding the Master. So it is with all desires and affections, all loves and fondnesses that people have for everything—father, mother, heaven, earth, gardens, palaces, knowledge, things to eat and drink. The lover of God realizes all these desires are truly the desire for God, and they are all veils covering humanity's eyes. When we pass into the next world and behold Reality without these coverings, then we realize that all those were cloaks, and that our true quest is for one thing. All difficulties are then resolved. We hear in our hearts the answer to all questions, and everything is seen clearly face to face.

It is not God's way to answer every problem separately, but with one answer all questions are satisfied. All at once the total struggle is resolved. In the same way, in winter everyone puts on warm clothes and a leather jacket and then creeps for shelter from the cold. So, too, all plants, trees and shrubs, bitten by the cold, remain without leaves and fruit, storing and hiding their goods and nourishment inwardly so that the grip of winter will not seize them. When spring, in a single epiphany, answers their requests, then all their various problems, whether human, animal or plant, are resolved, and those secondary symptoms disappear. Then all put forth their heads and realize the cause of their misery.

God has created these veils for a good purpose. For, if God's beauty were displayed without a cloak, we would not have the power to endure it. Through the intermediary of these coverings we derive life and enjoyment.

Look at the sun. Through its light we can distinguish good from bad and find warmth. Trees and orchards become fruitful from its heat, and their fruits—unripe, sour and bitter—become mature and sweet. Through its influence, mines of gold and silver, rubies and carnelians, are produced. But if the sun were to come nearer it would bring no benefit whatsoever. On the contrary, the whole world and every creature would be burned up and destroyed.

When God reveals Itself through a cloak to the mountain, those slopes become fully arrayed in trees and flowers and verdure. However, when God brings revelation without a veil, It destroys the mountain and breaks it into atoms.

Someone asks: "Well, isn't this the same sun in the winter?"

Rumi answers: Our purpose here is to draw a comparison. It is not a matter of atoms, or Adam. Similarity is one thing, comparison is another. Although our mind cannot comprehend that reality, yet how can mind abandon the effort? If our reason gave up the struggle, it would no longer be reason. Reason is that thing that perpetually, night and day, is restlessly thinking and struggling, striving to comprehend, even though God is unknowable and incomprehensible.

Reason is like a moth and the Beloved is like a candle. Whenever the moth dashes itself against the candle, it is consumed and destroyed, but the moth is this way by nature. No matter how much that consuming flame and agony may hurt, the moth cannot fly from the candle. If there were another creature like the moth that could not fly away from the light of the candle and dashed itself against that light, that would not be a mere comparison, that would be a moth itself. But if the moth dashed itself against the light of the candle, and the moth were not consumed, that indeed could not be a candle.

Therefore, the human being who can do without God, lacking even the desire—that is no human being at all. But if they are able to comprehend God, that indeed could not be God. So, true lovers are never free from striving; they revolve restlessly and ceaselessly around the light of God. And God consumes them, making them nothing, destroying the veil of their reason.

## COMMENTARY:

Rumi wants his students to pull back the masks to see the Face of God directly.

Desires for the Master can hide the Door we are looking for. The search for Truth, God, and all spiritual needs can become a desperate longing that keeps us from opening and walking through the doors and entering in.

Discovering something outside of ourselves is not what we need. We need to give up and surrender the little self and all of its desires to enter into the Reality, Itself.

Our reason must continue to search for understanding, but the one answer that solves all questions is something that reason cannot comprehend. Therefore, we need to teach our reason to surrender itself to the spiritual experience of Life. Here and now it is a part of us. We only need to let Life pour through us and wash away all these thoughts, feelings and desires.

This is what it means to be the moth consumed in the flame of what IS.

# Ten

THE AMIR SAYS TO RUMI: "Before you arrived just now, your eldest son, Baha al-Din, excused himself to me, saying, 'My father said that he doesn't want to put you to any trouble when you come to visit him. He said, "I am subject to various states of consciousness. In one state I speak, and in another I do not. In one state I attend to the affairs of others, and in another state I withdraw and go into retreat, while in yet another state I am utterly absorbed and beyond this world. I do not wish the Amir to come when I'm in a state of being that is disagreeable, when I am unable to counsel and converse with him. Therefore, it is better that, when I am free and able to attend to my friends and do them some good, I should go out and visit them."'"

The Amir continues: "I answered Baha al-Din, saying, 'I do not come here so that our Master should attend to me and converse with me. My purpose in coming is to have the honor of being amongst the company of his servants.' For example, just now you were preoccupied and did not show yourself until you had kept me waiting for a long time. This was so I would realize how difficult and disagreeable it is if I keep others waiting when they come to my door and I do not readily admit them. You have made me taste the bitterness of that and have given me a lesson so that I will not act like that with others."

Rumi answers: That's not true. On the contrary, my keeping you waiting is an expression of utmost loving-kindness. Just as God declares, "O my child, I would answer your smallest petition and slightest complaint without delay if it weren't that the voice of your complaint is so sweet to my ears. My answer lingers unspoken in hopes that you might complain again and again, for the sound of your voice is so sweet to me."

For example, two beggars come to the door of a certain person. One is highly loved and sought after, while the other is disliked. The owner of the house says to a slave, "Give that hated one a piece of bread quickly and without delay, so he will leave right away." To the other beloved beggar the owner makes promises, saying, "The bread is not yet baked. Wait patiently until the bread is properly cooked and baked."

My greater desire is to see my friends, to gaze my fill upon them and they on me. For when friends see deeply into one another here, below, and they are raised into the other world, they quickly recognize each other there. Knowing how closely they were together in the world of mortality, their reuniting brings great joy.

For all too quickly we lose our friends. Do you not see how in this mortal world you become the friend and darling of some person, and they become the very Joseph of beauty in your eyes. Then, on account of a single shameful act they vanish from your sight and you lose them completely? That Joseph-like form is changed into a wolf. This very same one you once saw as Joseph you now see as a wolf. Yet, their actual form has not changed. It is still the same as it always was. By that one accidental act you lost them. Tomorrow, when this present essence is changed into another essence, since you never really knew that person deeply, and never penetrated thoroughly into their essence, how are you going to recognize them?

The lesson to be learned from this is that we must see one another very well indeed. We must pass beyond the good and bad qualities that are present temporarily in everyone, and must enter into the other's very essence. We must see with exceptional clarity that these qualities people observe in one another are not their original qualities.

The story is told of a man, who said, "I know that fellow very well. I will give his distinguishing mark." His friends said, "Please do." The man answered, "He was a muleteer of mine. He had two black cows." People talk in this same way. "I consider So-and-So my friend. I know them." Yet every distinguishing mark they give is just like the two black cows. Those are not distinguishing marks. Those marks are of no use whatever.

So, we must pass beyond the good and evil in others and enter into their essence to see what they really are. That is truly seeing and knowing.

It astonishes me when some people say, "How do saints and lovers of God find love in the eternal world beyond form, space and time? How can they gain strength and help? How are they affected by things without body or shape?"

Is not all life, night and day, engaged with these very things? One person loves another person and derives help through that love. They find care and grace, kindness and knowledge, happiness and sorrow. All these belong to that formless world. Moment by moment they receive benefits from these abstractions and are affected by them. However, this doesn't surprise the doubters. Yet they are amazed that saints can find love in the invisible worlds, and derive help without form.

Once there was a philosopher who denied this reality. One day he became so sick he could not leave his bed, and his illness dragged on a long time. A certain theologian went to visit him.

"What are you seeking?" the theologian asked.

"Health," said the philosopher.

"Tell me how this health is shaped, so that I may find it for you."

"It has no shape," said the philosopher. "It is indescribable."

"If it is indescribable, then how can you look for it?" the theologian demanded.

"All I know," answered the philosopher, "is that when health arrives I grow in strength. I become plump, fresh and alive."

"From illness we learn of health," said the theologian. "From what is describable we learn of what is indescribable. Now abandon your doubting ways and I will return you to your vital self."

The Prophet was asked: "Although spiritual truth is inscrutable, can we derive its benefit through the embodiment of form?" Mohammad said: "Just as you see the changes of the stars, moon, and sun turning in the sky, and witness the rain from clouds in due season, summer and winter, and all the transformations of time."

You see all these things happen and know it is right and in accordance with wisdom. But how does that distant cloud know it is necessary to rain at its appointed time? Or how does this earth, when it receives a seed, know to return it tenfold? Well, Someone does this. Behold that Someone through the embodiment of this world and find nourishment. Just as you use the body of another person to contact their essence, use the embodiment of this world to touch that Reality.

When the Prophet was transported out of himself and spoke, he used to say, "God says." Now, from the standpoint of embodiment, it was his tongue that spoke; but he wasn't there at all. That speaker was greater than he was. Mohammad, knowing himself to be ignorant and without knowledge of such words, when he heard the wisdom coming through his own lips, he realized that he was no longer what he had been. Something greater moved him. He reported stories about past people and prophets who lived thousands of years before, and he told what would come to pass even to the end of the world. His being was but a thing of years. A mortal being surely can't describe such things. How can a creature born in time give information about the eternal? And so it became known that it was not he who was speaking. God was speaking.

God is wholly free of form and words. Its speech is beyond letters and voice. Yet, God delivers Its message by any letters and voice and tongue It desires.

People have carved the figures of men, women, and birds of stone along the banks of pools on the highways and in the caravansaries, and through the mouths of those statues water pours into the pool. Anyone with any sense knows that this water does not begin in the mouth of a stone bird, it comes from some other source.

If you want to get to know people, engage them in speech. By their words you will know them. If they are imposters, even if someone told them that people can be recognized by their words and they watch their words carefully to avoid being caught, still, in the end you will come to understand who they are.

This is illustrated by the story of the child and her mother. A child in the desert said to her mother, "On dark nights a horrible demon appears to me and I am terribly afraid."

"Don't be afraid," said her mother. "The next time you see that form, attack it bravely. Then you will clearly see that it is nothing but a fantasy."

"But mother," said the child, "what if the horrible demon's mother has given him similar advice? What shall I do if she has taught him, saying, 'Don't give in, so she will think you are real and powerful. And don't say a word, so that you won't be exposed'? How shall I recognize him then?"

"Keep silent, yield to his form as it is, and wait with patience," her mother answered. "Sooner or later some word will leap from his mouth. Or if it does not, from your own heart some words will spring forth unconsciously, or into your mind some thoughts or ideas will spring up, so that out of those thoughts you will know him for what he is. For this is how he has affected you. This is a reflection of his true self and his real feelings that have sprung up inside of you."

Sheikh Sar-razi was seated one day amongst his disciples. One of the disciples had a longing for some roasted sheep's head. The Sheikh called to his servant, saying, "Bring him some roasted sheep's head."

"How did you know that he wanted roasted sheep's head?" the disciples asked.

"Because it is now thirty years since such desires have filled me," the Sheikh answered. "I have cleansed and purified myself of all desires and have become clear as a polished mirror. When the thought of roasted sheep's head entered my mind, whetted my appetite and became a desire, I knew it belonged to our friend. For a mirror shows no image of itself. Any image it reflects is the image of another."

A worthy man once shut himself in a cave for forty days of contemplation, seeking spiritual enlightenment. A voice came to him, saying, "Such a lofty goal will never be attained by forty days' discipline. Abandon your cave so the love of a great saint may reach you and your goal can be realized."

"Where can I find such a great one?" the man asked.

"In the congregational mosque," came the answer.

"In such a throng of people, how shall I recognize which one he is?" he inquired.

"Go," said the voice, "he will recognize you and will gaze upon you. The sign that his love has fallen upon you will be when the pitcher drops from your hand and you become unconscious. Then you will know that his gaze has reached you."

The man acted accordingly. He filled a pitcher with water and went around the congregation in the mosque like a water-carrier. He was wandering between the ranks of the worshippers when suddenly he was seized with ecstasy. He uttered a loud cry, and the pitcher fell from his hand. He remained in a corner of the mosque unconscious. All the people left. When he came to his senses he saw that he was alone. He could not see the spiritual king who had gazed upon him, but he had gained his goal.

There are certain lovers of God, who, because of their great majesty and fervor for God, do not show themselves openly, but they cause disciples to attain important goals and bestow gifts upon them. Such mighty spiritual saints are rare and precious.

Someone says: "Do the great ones come before you?"

Rumi answers: There is no "before" left to me. It has been a long time since I have had any "before." If they come, they come before an image they believe to be me. Some people said to Jesus, "We will come to your house." Jesus replied, "Where is my house in this world, and how could I have a house?"

It is related that Jesus was wandering in the desert when a great rainstorm broke. He went to take shelter in the den of a jackal, in the corner of its cave, until the rain ceased. A revelation came to him, saying, "Get out of the jackal's den, for the jackal's little ones cannot rest on account of you." He cried aloud, "Lord, the jackal's pups have a shelter, but the son of Mary has no place to call home."

Although the jackal's whelp has a cave to live in, still it has no Beloved to drive it out of its home. But you do have such a One driving you out. If you have no home, what does that matter? The loving-kindness of such a Driver, and the grace from such a robe of honor that singles you out to be driven forth, is worth far more, exceeding a hundred thousand heavens and worlds here and beyond.

After the Amir leaves, Rumi says: The fact that the Amir came and I didn't show my face at once should not worry him. His purpose in coming was either to pay honor to me or to himself. If it was to pay honor to me, then the longer he sat and waited, the greater the honor he gained. If, on the other hand, his object was to honor himself and to seek a reward, then, since he waited and endured the pain of waiting, his reward will be all the greater. In either case his object in coming was realized many times over, so he should feel thankful and fortunate.

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## COMMENTARY:

Rumi wants to see his friends and for them to see him deeply so that when raised into the other world they will recognize each other. This is not just about finding friends and loved ones after death. He is talking about seeing and recognizing each other inwardly in the present moment. He is hinting at a spiritual exercise, yet he explains it in such a way that his words have meaning for everyone.

Modern day teachers would say that what Rumi is describing is called Darshan, which means being seen by and seeing the spiritual teacher, inwardly. It is a practice of opening the consciousness through the spiritual form of a teacher. Recognition of the true essence of a teacher often comes only after we first experience our own true self being recognized and accepted. It is an unmistakable inner event that awakens us to the subtle reality of the spiritual path.

But Rumi never openly explains this. He only hints at something important. He leaves the full meaning unsaid. He does not tear the cloak that separates the invisible worlds from the physical, but preserves it. This reveals one of Rumi's greatest teachings.

The whole meaning of Life is not shown to us at once. It reveals itself through layers of coverings. The spiritual path is the same way.

The teachings are never fully given out openly. They are revealed in stages. We are given subtle threads that connect to the inner reality, but must follow them to find what they really mean. We are led on step by step.

This is why it is so important to see into everything and everyone deeply.

The Amir misunderstood Rumi's real intentions for keeping him waiting. Rumi uses this to show that we cannot catch the real teaching unless we contact it deeply. Those who want it all to be made visible do not see the beauty of Life's veils. Only those who are drawn to look beneath the surface will find Her. They have something deep within them driving them out of their comfortable belief systems, their homes, like Jesus is driven from the jackal's cave.

Rumi refers to the story of Joseph, from the Bible and the Koran, because Joseph openly shared a dream that showed he would become a prophet. To his brothers this sounded like vanity. They thought Joseph was trying to act superior. This angered them and they turned against him. So, they devised a plan to sell him off into slavery and get rid of him. They took his shirt back to their father stained in blood, claiming Joseph had been killed by a wolf. However, Joseph ended up becoming a famous prophet interpreting the dreams of Egypt's Pharaoh, just as his dream predicted.

In other words, there is danger in openly describing inner truth. It can turn people against us. People need to first know a Teacher profoundly before the deeper aspects of the path are opened for them. Otherwise, the simplest thing he says or does might rise up like a wall to separate them from the path. Suddenly the Teacher is changed from Joseph to the wolf in their eyes. This is why the whole of the teaching is never shared openly.

There are reasons for veils. Therefore, we should look upon these coverings hiding the teaching as we would the cloak of a lover. By hiding Her beauty we are drawn to know more. Our yearning eventually leads us to search for everything.

> *But how does that distant cloud know it is necessary to rain at its appointed time? Or how does this earth, when it receives a seed, know to return it tenfold? Well, Someone*

> *does this. Behold that Someone through the embodiment of this world and find nourishment.*

Modern day scientists would say that the laws of physics determine when a cloud releases its rain, and the principles of biology explain the way seeds grow and produce a harvest. Therefore, they see no reason to look for Someone behind nature. But these laws of science only describe **how** things happen, not **why**. They don't reveal the longing of seeds for rain and the purpose of thirst. They don't explain the meaning of life-changing droughts and floods. Most importantly, they don't recognize the nourishment gained by knowing life deeply, like the invisible benefit we gain from a close friend. In other words, scientific explanations miss the whole spiritual aspect of life.

> *Anyone with any sense knows that this water does not begin in the mouth of a stone bird, it comes from some other source.*

Only fools would say stone birds produce water. Then, why do people refuse to look behind the world to find the Someone whose body this is? Have they forgotten there is another way of knowing? How do they think they come to know their friends?

> *People talk in this same way. "I consider So-and-so my friend. I know them." Yet every distinguishing mark they give is just like the two black cows. Those are not distinguishing marks. Those marks are of no use whatever.*

This is why some Saints hide themselves and will not teach openly. They care only about real marks of Truth. They are so drawn to God, and see such beauty in Its veils that they cannot bring themselves to speak of love. It is something they must live, with their whole being. People gain from them and are lifted by them, but they may never know how such Silent Ones inspired them or gave them inner guidance.

None of this has anything to do with personality. This is why Rumi says, *There is no "before" left to me.*

People may look to a Teacher, but that form is only a stone bird. True spiritual travelers, just like the teachings themselves, are hidden beneath such coverings. To know them and to be recognized by them is to become lost in an ocean that begins and ends with God.

There is no home for Soul in this world. As this deeper truth dawns on us, we let go of all forms and attachments. We become restless searching. We may not find our true home here, but we can find the One who is driving us on.

We need only look deeply into everyone and everything to see such a One.

# Eleven

RUMI SAYS: The saying, "Hearts bear witness to one another," refers to a hidden reality. If all reality were openly revealed, what need would there be for words? Similarly, when the heart bears witness, what need is there for the testimony of the tongue?

The Amir says: "Certainly the heart bears witness. But the heart plays one part by itself, the ear another, the eye another, the tongue another. There is need for each one, so that the whole can be realized."

Rumi says: If the heart is totally absorbed, then all the other senses are obliterated in it, and there is no need for the tongue. Take the case of Laila: She was not a spiritual being, but of flesh, fashioned of water and clay. Yet passion for her produced such absorption, and so utterly seized and overwhelmed Majnun, that he had no need to see Laila with his eyes, no need to hear her voice. He could not separate himself from the thought of her, causing him to cry out:

*Your name is upon my tongue,*
*Your image in my sight,*
*Your memory in my heart,*
*Where can I send these words I write?*

Physical passion is so powerful that it can bring us to where we can't see ourselves apart from our beloved. All our senses become absorbed: sight, hearing, smell and the rest. No sense seeks a separate view, all being united. If each sense plays its part completely, all are immersed in one experience and desire nothing else. Seeking a separate desire proves that a sense has not found its true, whole portion. It is enjoying an incomplete piece and, therefore, is not immersed, nor fulfilled. Then the other senses begin seeking their own part, and all become divided.

From the viewpoint of reality, all senses see one thing; but from the standpoint of outward form, they are each different. When one sense is moved to absorption, all the senses become absorbed in it. When a fly flies upward it moves its wings, its head, and its whole body separately; but when it is immersed in honey, then all of its parts are alike—none can move at all.

Absorption is such that whoever enters into it is no longer there. They make no more efforts, they cease to act and move. They are immersed in the water. No action is their action; it is the action of the water. But if they flail about in the water with their hands and feet, they are not truly submerged. If they utter a cry, "I am drowning," this, too, is not absorption.

Take the famous utterance, "I am God." Some people think this is a great pretension, but "I am God" is in fact a great humility. Those who say, instead, "I am a servant of God" believe that two exist, themselves and God. But those who say, "I am God" have become nothing and have cast themselves to the winds. They say, "I am God" meaning, "I am not. God is all. There is no existence but God. I have lost all separation. I am nothing." In this the humility is greater.

This is what ordinary people don't understand. When they render service in honor of God's glory, their servanthood is still present. Even though it is for the sake of God, they still see themselves and their own actions as well as God—they are not drowned in the water. That person is drowned when no movement or any action belongs to them, all their movements spring from the movement of the water.

A lion was chasing a deer and the deer was fleeing. There were two beings evident: the lion and the deer. But when the lion caught up and the deer was overpowered beneath the lion's clutch, out of terror the deer became unconscious and senseless, collapsing before the lion. In that moment only the lion remained. The deer was erased and no longer existed.

True absorption is when God creates in saints a fear. This is not the fear of men and women who are frightened of lions, leopards, and death. Rather, it is the fear of separation. This fear is a gift from God, just as security, pleasure and joy, eating and sleeping—all these are gifts from God.

God shows the saints, while they are fully conscious, forms that only they can see. The inner form of the lion, leopard, and fire become visible so that they will know true reality is not of this world, but of the world unseen. It is projected forth for them to witness.

In the same way, they are shown their own Self in magnificent form. Likewise, gardens and rivers, maids of Paradise and palaces, all types of food and drink, robes of honor, fleet steeds, cities, castles, and every kind of marvel—they know these are not of this world. God shows and reveals these secrets before their eyes. Thus, they come to know with certainty that fear of separation comes from God, as do security, comfort, and all spiritual displays.

Now this fear of losing God's presence does not resemble the fears that most men and women know, because it is a result of revelation and experience. God clearly shows the saint that all things belong to God. The philosophers may know this, but they know it by intellectual reasoning, and such proof is not permanent. The pleasure that comes from reason will not last. When the memory of the proof passes, its warmth and thrill pass away as well.

Thus, we know by reasoning that this house had a builder. We know by deduction that this builder had eyes and was not blind, had power and was not powerless, was living and not dead, and existed before the house was built. All these facts we know, but we know them by logic. Such proof is not lasting and is soon forgotten. Lovers of God, however, being absorbed in God, have come to know the Builder and have seen with the eye of knowingness. They have eaten bread and salt and mingled the two together. The Builder is never absent from their heart and their gaze. Men and women such as this pass away in God. With them, sin is not sin, and crime is not crime, since they are absorbed.

A certain king ordered his slaves, every one, to take in their hand a golden cup to greet a guest. His favorite slave was also commanded to take a cup. When the king showed his face, that special slave, on beholding the king, lost control of himself and was overwhelmed. The cup fell from his hand and was shattered. When the other slaves saw this they said, "Perhaps we should do this as well," and they cast down their cups deliberately.

"Why did you do that?" the king scolded them.

"He was your favorite, and that was what he did," they replied.

"Fools!" the king cried out. "He didn't do that. I did."

To outward eyes, all of the slaves were sinful. But that one act was the very acme of obedience. Indeed, it transcended obedience and sin. Of them all, the true lover was that one slave. The others were but followers of the king. They followed that slave because he had become the essence of the king, only outwardly wearing the form of slavery. He was filled with the beauty of the king.

God declares, "If it weren't for you, I would never have created the heavens." This is the same as "I am God." It means, "I created the heavens for I love you as Myself." This is "I am God" in another language and another tongue.

Though the words of the great saints appear in a hundred different forms, since God is one and the Way is one, how can their words be different? Though their teachings appear to contradict, their meaning is one. Separation exists in their outward form only; in inner purpose they all agree.

A prince orders a tent to be stitched. One person twists the rope, another strikes the pegs, another weaves the cloth, another stitches, another rends, another uses a needle. Though to outward appearance they are diverse and different, in inner purpose they are united and performing a single task.

So it is with the affairs of this world. When you look at it carefully, all are doing God's service—reprobate and righteous, sinner and disciple, devil and angel.

For example, the king wants to test and try his slaves so the steadfast can be sorted from the weak-hearted, the loyal from the traitor, the faithful from the fake. If he did not have tempters and provokers, how could he test his slaves' loyalty? So, the tempters and provokers are serving the king, since it is by the king's will that they act. He sends a wind to show the difference between the stable and the unstable, to separate the gnat from the sparrow-hawk, so the gnat will vanish and the sparrow-hawk will remain.

A certain king ordered a slave-girl to adorn herself and offer herself to his slaves, so their loyalty could be revealed. Though the girl's actions appeared immoral outwardly, in reality she was doing the king's work.

The great saints have seen for themselves, not by proof and reason, but face to face and unveiled, that all people—good or evil—are obedient servants of God. Nothing exists that does not proclaim God's praise. Therefore, to the saints, this world itself is the resurrection, since the resurrection means all people serving God and doing no other work but God's work. These saints perceive this truth even here below, for, even were the veil removed, they would not increase in their certainty.

All may be servants, but some have been raised above others in their closeness to God. To those who are absorbed, all differences are lost. To those who have not yet arrived, many stages appear between one and another.

Let me cite a parallel. A gardener planted a tree and the tree bore fruit. Surely, this tree that bore fruit is better than a hundred trees that are barren. It is possible those other trees may never bear at all, since there are many stages of growth where disease might attack. Pilgrims who reach the Kaaba are better than those still traveling in the desert. Pilgrims in the desert fear they may never pass the many landmarks to reach the Kaaba, while the former have already reached their destination. One certainty is better than a hundred doubts.

The Amir says: "Those who have not arrived still have hope."

Rumi answers: What is the hopeful person compared to one who has arrived? There is a vast difference between fear and attainment. Why should I speak of such a difference when it is obvious to all? What I am speaking about is attainment, since there are many differences between the stations of attainment.

It is possible to indicate the various stages of fear and the stations of fear, but the stations of attainment have no indication. In the world of fear everyone decides what they will devote to honor God. One person gives through physical efforts, another donates their wealth, another sacrifices their life. One worships with fasting, another with prayer, another by ten prostrations, another by a hundred. These stages are very different and can easily be distinguished. In the same manner there are stages of travel from Konya to Caesarea that are distinct and well-known: One must pass Qaimaz, Uprukh, Sultan, and so forth. But the stages by sea from Antalya to Alexandria are without landmarks. The ship's captain knows the signs, but they are not shared with landsmen since landsmen cannot understand.

The Amir says: "But even speaking about it imparts some benefit. We may not know everything, yet still we learn a little and can find out and guess the rest."

Rumi replies: Yes indeed, by Allah! Some sit wakeful through the dark night, thinking of a way to find the day. Though they do not know how to get there, still, in waiting for daylight, the day approaches. Others are traveling by caravan upon a dark night in a storming rain. They do not know where they have gone, which way they are passing, or what distance they have covered, but when day comes they see the results of that traveling and go on from there. Whoever labors for the glory of God, though both their eyes are sealed, their labor is not lost. Even an atom's weight of good is not lost. Though all within is dark and veiled, and they do not see how far they have progressed, still in the end they will know. "This world is the seed-plot of the world to come." Whatever they sow here, they will reap in the next world.

Jesus laughed a lot. John wept a lot. John said to Jesus, "You have become exceedingly carefree against all the subtle deceits that you laugh so much." Jesus replied, "You have become exceedingly unmindful of the subtle, mysterious, wonderful graces and loving kindness of God that you weep so much." One of God's saints was present at this incident. He asked God, "Which of these two has the higher station?" God answered, "He who has the better image of Me." In other words, "I come when the idea of Me enters your imagination. Each person has an image and an idea of Me. Whatever picture he forms of Me, there I am. I fill that picture. That is where I dwell. I care nothing for the reality where the thought of God does not exist. Cleanse your thoughts, O human, for they are My abode and dwelling place."

Now test yourself as to weeping and laughter, fasting and prayer, solitude and company, and the rest. Which of these is more profitable to you? Whichever brings you straighter on the road and gains you the greatest advancement, choose that task. Take counsel from your heart, even though others may disagree. The truth is within you. Compare it with what others say. When they agree, then follow that course.

The physician comes to someone who is sick and questions the inward doctor; for within you there is a doctor, namely your natural temperament, instincts and inclinations. Therefore the external physician questions it: "This food that you ate, how was it? Was it light? Was it heavy? How was your sleep?" From what the inward doctor answers, the external physician makes their prescription. Therefore the root of the matter is the inner doctor; the patient's own response. When this internal doctor is feeble and its temperament is corrupt, the sick person sees things incorrectly and gives skewed answers. They say that sugar is bitter, vinegar is sweet. Therefore they need the external physician to guide them until their own instinct is restored. After that they consult only their own doctor inside to find the counsel they need.

We have a similar doctor within our spiritual being. When this higher Self is feeble, our inward senses perceive falsely, and whatever we follow is contrary to the truth. So the saints are physicians who guide a person until their instinct is restored to its right balance, and their religion and their heart have gathered strength.

*"Show me things as they truly are."*

Humanity is a mighty volume. Within the people of this world all things are written, but veils and darkness do not allow men and women to read the knowledge within themselves. The veils and darknesses are those many preoccupations, worldly desires and thoughts of every kind. Yet, though they are wrapped in darkness and are hidden by so many veils, they can still read something and, therefore, learn. Consider when these darknesses and veils are removed, what they will learn then, and what varieties of knowledge they will discover within!

All these trades and professions—tailoring, building, carpentry, goldsmithery, science, astronomy, medicine and the rest of the world's countless and innumerable callings—all these were discovered from within by some person. They were not revealed by stones and dirt. When they say that a raven taught people to bury the dead, even this came from the reflection of a human being. Someone's inner urge drove them to learn from the bird. After all, animal instincts are a part of humanity, but how should the part command the whole? Like the person who tries to write with their left hand, instead of their right; their hand might shake and tremble, but it still writes under the control of their heart.

After the Amir leaves, someone says: "When the Amir comes, the Master utters mighty words. The words never stop, because he is a master of words. Words flow from him without interruption."

Rumi says: If in winter time the trees do not put forth leaves and fruit, people should not think they are not working. They are continually at work. Winter is the season of gathering; summer is the season of spending. Everyone sees the spending, but they do not see the gathering in. In the same way, a person gives a party and spends all sorts of money on it. Everyone sees this, but no one sees the gathering in and collecting little by little for the sake of that entertainment. No one sees any of that. Yet the ingathering is the root of the matter, since their spending comes out of that income.

Whoever we are in harmony with, we talk with them every moment, in their absence or presence alike, even in silence. We might fight with them, but we stay tied together. Even if we strike with our fists, still, these are words spoken from our bonds with them. Ignore those fists—in their grip is love. You don't believe this? Then open those clenched hands to see if they hide sweet raisins or pearls of great price.

Many people speak fine, graceful sayings and lofty wisdom in verse and prose. The inclination of the Amir towards us is not on account of lofty wisdom, graceful sayings and sermonizing. Things of that kind are to be found everywhere, and are by no means in short supply. His loving me and his inclination towards me is not for those things. He sees something else. He sees a light transcending what he finds from others.

It is related that a certain king summoned Majnun before him.

"What has happened to you. What has befallen you?" the king inquired. "You have disgraced yourself, forsaken your hearth and home, become wasted and utterly destroyed. What is Laila? What beauty is hers? I will show you many beautiful and lovely girls. Name your ransom and I will bestow them upon you."

When they were brought to court, Majnun and the lovely girls were duly introduced. Majnun kept his head cast down, staring in front of himself.

"Well now, lift up your head and look!" the king commanded.

"I am afraid," Majnun replied. "My love for Laila is a drawn sword. If I raise my head, that blade will strike it off."

Majnun had become immersed in his love for Laila. Yet, the other girls also had eyes and lips and hair. What then had he found in Laila to come to such a state?

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## COMMENTARY:

From the beginning to the end of this discourse, Rumi is exploring a deeply hidden meaning to the saying, "Hearts bear witness to each other."

Lovers of God become united and act as one with the whole of Life. No words are possible to capture what they experience. They find truth without any speaking.

When we work for our own personal desires, this is a sign we have not achieved such a state. We have not found the whole of reality or our full share. Our heart is not bearing witness; it is still separate and seeing from its own little self. It has not yet attained the state of being a mirror for all life.

We must set aside our egos. This is like a death, since we must let go of everything we think of as ourselves. Traditional religious practices or acts of devotion and sacrifices mean nothing if we think these are our acts. As long as we act from our little selves, our hearts are not yet bearing witness. We must lose all sense of separation.

Rumi uses the term "absorption" to describe this, but do not confuse this with the saying that we should become one with God or become absorbed in the bliss of God. Rumi is referring to a state far beyond that.

> *There is a vast difference between fear and attainment. Why should I speak of such a difference when it is obvious to all? What I am speaking about is attainment, since there are many differences between the stations of attainment. It is possible to indicate the various stages of fear and the stations of fear, but the stations of attainment have no indication.*

When people hear about the oneness of God and becoming absorbed in the bliss of God, they think this is what Rumi means. The fly immersed in honey loses all movement of its own. The deer becomes nothing in the clutches of the lion. But Rumi is describing subtle differences in states of spiritual attainment that go far beyond the intoxicating bliss of God.

How do you describe differences that have no indication? How do you trace out subtleties that can only be known to those who attain them? We need to listen a little more carefully.

Rumi is not saying that the fly becomes destroyed by the honey, but that its own actions spring forth from the honey. It realizes that every single thing it does proceeds from the honey and it doesn't act any other way. Rumi does not mean to say that the deer becomes nothing. Rather it becomes the lion and a part of the lion's desire. It has surrendered to the lion and united to its purpose.

> *That person is drowned when no movement or any action belongs to them, all their movements spring from the movement of the water.*

In other words, this is not about death, but a new transformed state of life where all of our actions spring forth from the Whole.

There is of course a spiritual step where the "little self," or ego, is erased, and indeed the feeling of bliss and oneness here seems like the ultimate experience. However, this is a passive state compared to what Rumi is hinting at.

> *God shows the saints, while they are fully conscious, forms that only they can see....so that they will know true reality is not of this world, but of the world unseen. It is projected forth for them to witness. In the same way, they are shown their own Self in magnificent form.*

How can they be seeing "their own Self" if they are absorbed in the bliss of God? As you can see, Rumi is describing something else: The discovery of their own hearts acting as voices for God and finding their own speech carrying the currents of God's Speech. They see the actions of all life come from God, not merely as an idea, but through the experience of it working through them. They have now become a part of this mystery.

> *"Fools!" the king cried out. "He didn't do that. I did."*

Everyone else follows slaves who remind them of the king. Rumi is pointing the way to something else—to becoming so completely absorbed in God that our actions are nothing but God's actions. This means moving from the position of acting for God or Life, to acting from. It is a rare state.

The only fear such special ones have is the fear of losing this station in life. Through this state of beingness, they have come to the experience that there is no separation between Soul and God. They want only to see life through God's eyes, you might say, and for this knowingness to become a part of their being so deeply that nothing could ever shake it from them again.

Here is what Rumi's teacher, Shams-i-Tabriz said:

> *"Beyond these outward sheiks who are famous among the people and mentioned from the pulpits and in the assemblies, there are hidden servants, more complete than the famous*

> *ones. And there's a sought one, who is found by some of them. . . . However, the story of the sought one is not known in any book, nor in the explanations for the paths, nor in the treatises—all those are merely explanations of the road. About that one person, we've heard this, nothing else."*[8]

We've heard nothing because there are no words to explain. Only hearts bearing witness know this truth.

Rumi is showing his students how to see with their hearts, so they will know the meaning of these secrets.

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[8] *Me and Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi,* translated by Chittick, pages 180–181.

# Twelve

AFTER THE AMIR ARRIVES, Rumi says: I've been longing to call on you. But, knowing you were busy with the interests of the people, I spared you the trouble.

The Amir answers: "This duty has been pressing upon me. Now that the emergency has ended, from now on I will wait upon you."

Rumi says: There is no difference. It is all the same thing. You are so gracious that all things are the same to you. Since today it is you who are occupied with good deeds and charities, naturally I am the one to call on you.

Just now we were discussing this question: If a saint who carries God's secret jewel [spiritual grace] strikes a man, breaking his nose and jaw, who is the wronged party? Everyone says the man who is hurt is mistreated. But in reality the wronged person is the saint striking the blow, because whoever does not act in the best interests of others is the person doing wrong. The man who was punched and had his head broken is the wrongdoer, and the saint is surely the wronged party. Since the saint carries God's jewel and is consumed in God, their actions are God's actions. We wouldn't call God a wrongdoer.

The Prophet also killed, spilled blood and raided, but the unbelievers were the wrongdoers, and Mohammad was wronged. For example, a westerner lives in the West. An oriental comes to visit. The westerner is a stranger to the oriental, but who is the real stranger? Is not the oriental a stranger to the entire western world?

Still, this whole world is but a house, no more. Whether we go from this room to that room or from this corner to that corner, are we still not in the same house? But the saints who possess God's jewel have left this house. They have gone beyond. Mohammad said, "Islam began a stranger and will return a stranger as it began." Yet is not this world the real stranger? Therefore, when the Prophet was defeated he was the wronged party, and when he defeated his enemies, he was still the wronged party. For in both cases he was in the right, and the wronged party is the one who is in the right.

Mohammad's heart ached for his prisoners. To comfort the Prophet, God sent down a revelation saying: O Prophet, say to the prisoners in your hands, "If you turn to truth and the righteous way, God will deliver you out of bondage. It will restore everything you have lost, and much more, including treasures in the world to come."

The Amir asks: "When a servant of God performs a service, does the grace and good arise from that action, or is it the gift of God?"

Rumi answers: It is the gift of God and the grace of God. Yet God, out of Its exceeding love gives credit for both the action and the grace to the servant, declaring, "Both are yours."

The Amir says: "Since God has such love, then everyone who seeks, in truth, shall find."

Rumi says: But without a guide this does not come to pass. So, when the Israelites were obedient to Moses, ways were opened up to them even through the sea. But when they were disobedient, they remained in the wilderness for many years. The leaders of a given time are charged to secure the welfare of those who are bound to them and are strictly obedient. For instance, if a group of soldiers follows the orders of their commander, he too cares for their welfare and is duty bound to work at securing it. But if they are not obedient, how can he be expected to look after their interests?

The mind is the commander of the human body. So long as the parts of the body surrender to it, all the body's affairs proceed perfectly, but when they disobey, the whole natural order breaks down. Haven't you seen when a man is drunk, his hands and feet and tongue refuse to obey him? Then on the following day, when he is sober again, he cries, "What have I done? Why did I do and say such horrible things?"

In the same way, a village works together in perfect order only when there is a leader that the villagers follow.

Just as the mind is commander in the midst of the body, so all the different beings who make up humankind, together with their many minds, knowledge, speculation and learning, are the body of humanity, and the saint is the mind in the midst of them. Now when these people, who are the body, do not follow that mind, their affairs all fall into confusion and conflict.

They must surrender in such a fashion that no matter what the saint does, they accept it without the argument of their own mind. For often, with their own mind, they cannot understand the saint's actions. Therefore, they must submit to whatever the saint says. Similarly, when children are apprenticed to a tailor they must obey whatever they are told to do. If they are given a patch to sew, they must sew it. If they are given a hem, they must sew that hem. If they wish to learn their trade, they must surrender their own desires completely and become submissive to the tailor's orders.

### *"The Night of Power is better than a thousand months."*[9]

God offers us divine guidance and care, which are superior to a hundred thousand strivings and struggles. One tug from God is better than the efforts of all our powers. That is to say, when divine care intervenes, it does the work of a hundred thousand struggles and more. Struggling is fine, and useful, but what is it compared to God's guidance and care?

The Amir asks: "Does God's care create struggles?"

Rumi answers: Why shouldn't it? When divine care arrives, struggling begins. Jesus—what a struggle he made! Yet John the Baptist recognized his gift while Jesus was still in Mary's womb. Grace comes first. Then if, by chance, awareness enters in, this is the fruit of God's grace—the pure gift of the Lord. If this were not true, then how could Jesus' disciples have received such blessings?

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[9] The night of power in Islam is the holy night when the Koran was revealed to Mohammad.

Grace and submission are like a spark of fire that leaps. First we receive the gift. If we add cotton and nurse that spark until it grows, then that is submission. In the beginning our spark is small and weak. But, once we have nursed that weakling fire it spreads across the world and sets the universe aflame. The little spark becomes a great and powerful blaze.

Someone says to the Amir: "Our Master loves you very much."

Rumi replies: Neither my coming nor my speaking is an indication of my love. I say whatever comes into me. If God wills, It makes these few words profitable so they will grow within your heart, bringing great rewards. If God wills not, if even a hundred thousand words are spoken, they will not lodge in the heart but will pass by and be forgotten. If a spark of fire lands upon a burnt rag and God wills, that one spark will take and engulf the rag. If God wills not, a hundred sparks will fall on that tinder and leave no mark.

These words are God's army. By God's authority they open and seize fortresses. If God commands thousands of horsemen to go and show their faces at such and such a fortress but not to capture it, so it will be. If It commands a single horseman to seize that fortress, that same single horseman will open the fortress gates and capture it.

God sent a gnat against Nimrod and it destroyed him. "Equal in the eyes of the Gnostic are a penny and a dollar, a lion, and a cat." If God bestows Its blessing, one penny does the work of a thousand dollars and more. If God withholds Its blessing from a thousand dollars, they cannot do the work of one penny. So too, if God commissions the cat it destroys the lion, as the gnat destroyed Nimrod. In short, when we realize that all things are of God, all things become one and the same in our eyes.

I hope, too, that you will hear these words within your hearts, for that would be profitable. If a thousand thieves come from outside, they cannot open the door without some fellow-thief inside who can unlock that door. Speak a thousand words from the outside, still, so long as there is none to answer from within, the door never opens. So too with a tree—as long as there is no moist thirst in its roots, even if you poured a thousand torrents of water over it, it would accomplish nothing. First there must be a thirst in its roots for the water to nourish it.

Although the whole world is ablaze with a hundred thousand lights, without the spark of light within our eyes, no one could behold that brightness. The root of this matter is the receptiveness within Soul.

Soul is one thing and spirit is another. Don't you see during sleep how Soul travels abroad? Spirit remains in the body, keeping it alive, but Soul wanders and is transformed. When Mohammad said, "He who knows his own self knows his Lord," he was speaking of knowing Soul.

If we say that he was speaking of this soul or that soul, that is something different. On the other hand, if we explain it as meaning "Soul," Itself, the listener may still think we mean one soul, since they do not yet know the whole of Soul, Itself. Mere words cannot convey this spiritual understanding. Words only reveal what the heart has an ear to hear.

Beyond this world is another world for us. This world and its delights cater to the animal within us. These pleasures all fill our animal nature, while our real self slowly dies. They say, "The human being is a rational animal," yet we consist of two things. Lust and desire feed our animality in this material world. But as for our true essence, its food is knowledge, wisdom, and the sight of God. The animality within us flees away from God, while our spiritual self flees away from this world.

> *"One of you is an unbeliever, and one of you a believer." Two people are warring within you. Who shall succeed? The one that Fortune makes her friend.*

This world is a world of winter. Isn't the name "solid" given to inanimate things? These stones and mountains, and the garments worn by this world, are all solidified. The inner essence of this world can be known by its effects: it is wind and bitter cold. It is like the winter season when all things are frozen. What manner of winter is it? A winter of the mind. When that divine zephyr comes along, these mountains will begin to melt, and the solidity of this world will dissolve—just like when the warmth of summer comes along, all the snow and ice turn to water. On the resurrection day, when that zephyr blows, all things will melt away.

God makes these words an army to surround you and protect you against the enemy, and to be the means of overwhelming the enemy. For there are enemies—enemies within and enemies without. Yet they are really nothing—what could they be?

Don't you see how a thousand godless people submit themselves to one leader who becomes their ruler, and that ruler is captive to his own thoughts? From this it is easy to see the effect of thoughts, since through one feeble and muddled thought thousands of people and worlds are taken prisoner. Consider then, those whose thoughts are without limitations—what grandeur and splendor they possess, how easily they overwhelm the enemy, and what worlds they subdue!

When I see the limitless wisdom that exists, while armies unending stretch through waste upon waste, all prisoners of one person, and that person the prisoner of a contemptible little thought—where do they all stand compared to thoughts of powerful depths, infinite light, holy, and sublime?

Therefore thoughts have real effects. In this physical world all living things merely follow and act as instruments of thought. Without thought they are inanimate and solid. In the same way, those who understand only the outer form are also solid. They cannot penetrate the meaning. They are children, spiritually, and immature even if they are Sufi sheikhs, a hundred years old.

> *"We have returned from the lesser holy war to fight the Greater Holy War."*

We all see the battle with outward things and people, and we draw up our forces against these formal adversaries. We must also draw up our forces against the armies of thoughts, so that desirable thoughts will defeat destructive thoughts and drive them out of the kingdom of our bodies. This then is indeed the greater struggle and the greater war.

Thoughts have their effect. They work beyond the influence of the body like the Laws of Nature keep the heavens turning without any instrument. Therefore, philosophers say that thoughts don't require a body. After all, the body is but an accident. Why should anyone dwell on an accident?

Reality is like a musk-pod, and this material world and its delights are merely the scent of that musk. This scent is but transient, a mere accident. The individual who seeks the musk itself, not happy with only the scent, that person is wise. But whoever is satisfied to possess the scent is a fool. They have chased after a thing their hand cannot grasp, for the scent is merely an attribute of the musk. So long as the musk is present in this world, its scent comes to the nostrils. However, when it leaves this world and crosses that invisible veil, all those who lived by its scent die. The scent follows the musk and goes wherever the musk goes.

Fortunate is the person who finds the musk by following its scent and then becomes one with the musk. They never die, but become an eternal part of the musk's essence, imbued with the qualities of the musk. They will carry its scent to the world, and the world is revived by them. Only the name of what that person used to be survives, as with a horse or any other animal that has turned to salt in the desert, only the name of horse remains to it. In effect and in truth it has now become a part of that great ocean of salt. What good or harm can a name do? It will not bring it out of its saltiness. And if you give some other name to this salt-mine, it will not change its taste.

So it behooves us to turn away from the pleasures and delights of this world that are the rays and reflections of God. We must not become content with this much, even though this much exists through God's grace and the radiance of God's beauty. Still, it is not eternal. From God's viewpoint it is eternal, but from our viewpoint it is not. It is like the rays of the sun that shine into our house, for though they are rays of the sun and are light, yet they belong to the sun. When the sun sinks, the light disappears, too. Therefore it behooves us to become the Sun, so the fear of separation cannot cloud our life.

There is giving, and there is knowingness. Some have generosity and compassion but no true knowledge. Some have knowledge but no self-sacrifice. When both are present, that person is blessed and prosperous. Such a being is truly incomparable.

A stranger is going along a road, but does not know where the road begins or ends, or whether they have wandered the wrong way. They go on blindly, hoping that perhaps a cock will crow, or some other sign of habitation will appear. How can such a stranger be compared with those who know the road and travel at ease, not needing sign or way-mark? They have their assigned task clearly before them. Therefore, knowing exceeds all else.

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## COMMENTARY:

Rumi challenges many of our basic cultural assumptions, and often in ways we may not notice if we aren't careful. It is easy to make the mistake of rejecting an idea on the grounds that it is out of date, or that it sounds merely like a traditional, orthodox opinion. I would caution about ever jumping to this conclusion with Rumi, since you will more likely find that he has caught you making the very same error.

Rumi asks the question:

> *If a saint who carries God's secret jewel [spiritual grace] strikes a man, breaking his nose and jaw, who is the wronged party?*

Rumi claims it is the saint who is wronged:

> *Since the saint carries God's jewel and is consumed in God, their actions are God's actions. We wouldn't call God a wrongdoer.*

At first glance, this smacks of religious zealotry. The same sort that brought about the killings and murders of the Inquisition and modern day acts of terrorism. No different than any self-justified excuse. Anyone can blame God for their own choices, we say. But read

Rumi's words closely; he is not talking about justifying violence. He is asking what makes an act right or wrong, good or bad. He is asking us to look beneath our cultural ideas of right and wrong to see the true cause: God's love for all of life.

But the problem doesn't stop here, since we have not yet caught Rumi's vision. Our culture rejects ideas of Absolute Right or Wrong. We have learned that everyone must decide for themselves what is true. No outside authority has the right to force their perspective on what is God's will. So, after centuries of petty religious battles and church-state slaughters, we have tried to solve this problem socially by placing personal rights above religious belief. In other words, we still don't believe the saint has the right to strike.

Rumi knows all this and is way ahead. He goes on to say:

> *A westerner lives in the West. An oriental comes to visit. The westerner is a stranger to the oriental, but who is the real stranger? Is not the oriental a stranger to the entire western world?*

In other words, sure the idea of a true saint using violence sounds strange and wrong to us, because it is a stranger to our thoughts. But if this true saint speaks and acts only from Truth, in the best interests of others, then who is the real stranger to Truth?

Rumi continues:

> *This whole world is but a house, no more. Whether we go from this room to that room or from this corner to that corner, still are we not in the same house? But the saints who possess God's jewel have left this house. They have gone beyond. Mohammad said, "Islam began a stranger and will return a stranger as it began."*

In this way, Rumi's words come right through time and ask us today: Can you accept that a true Lover of God could carry God's authority? Can you see that, because of what they know, they will always be a stranger to this world?

So, who is out of date? Certainly anyone bound by the culture of their time, anyone who is not moved by something greater.

If you see what is happening here, you will see that Rumi is using our own unexamined aversions and dislikes to teach us.

Rumi goes on to challenge another popular belief when he answers the Amir's comment that anyone who seeks shall find.

*But without a guide this does not come to pass.*

Rumi rarely speaks so directly about the principles of the spiritual path. He says this bluntly probably because he knows full well that few can understand its depth. He composed tens of thousands of lines of poetry about his love for his guide, Shams. You would think it would be obvious how important having a spiritual Master was to him. But all of his poetry is such a personal expression of love that many overlook how Rumi is simply trying to show his own experience, while holding back from saying what it really means. He is sharing secrets of the path by clothing them as love poems.

In this discourse he explains the necessity of a Teacher. The saint is not just someone filled with the presence of God. They have become a part of the musk itself and now carry Its scent into this world. The whole world gains, but the full benefits are found only by those who submit to them.

Who is ready to accept an idea like this? This is exactly why he starts off by asking about a saint who strikes another person. Could we submit to someone who does something considered as wrong as this by society? In other words, in our culture of self-reliance and free will, proud of our rights to do whatever we want, who is willing to surrender everything they prize so highly to the hidden saints of this world who guide mankind? How many will set aside their own desires to find the whole of life?

Submission to a Master is about as popular these days as stealing candy from a baby. It is easier to find "a thousand godless people" who have become the prisoners of some foolish idea, than it is to find those who know the true meaning of self-surrender. Countless people have become followers of religion, and even more have become preachers telling people what they want to hear, but it is rare to find those who are strong enough within themselves to set aside the desires of their little selves for the sake of Truth.

> *Grace and submission are like a spark of fire that leaps.... If we add cotton and nurse that spark until it grows, then that is submission.... But, once we have nursed that weakling fire it spreads across the world and sets the universe aflame.*

Somehow those sparks will find us—but will we allow them in and fan the flames? When love touches us, will we let it burn?

Rumi is not talking about surrendering to an idea, a mission, or a plan. He is not talking about orthodox faith or becoming a true believer. In fact, these are the things he is talking about giving up for the sake of Soul. Not your soul or my soul, but Soul of Itself—our higher Self that is inseparable from God. We have become prisoners of thoughts and beliefs that limit us in a thousand ways from the limitlessness that is Soul. We don't realize how much we have to learn. We hold on so dearly to something so small.

This is why it is important to submit to a guide who knows the way. They travel at ease, because they have been down this road many times before. Rumi does not say much about this directly. He is just hinting.

> *When that divine zephyr comes along, these mountains will begin to melt, and the solidity of this world will dissolve....*

Have you experienced this? Do you know what he means?

# Thirteen

Mohammad said:

*The night is long, do not shorten it with your sleep. The day is bright, do not darken it with your sins.*

The night is long for you to voice your inmost secrets and to ask for your needs without the distraction and disturbance of friends and foes. You are granted peace and privacy as God draws down the veil before the eyes of others, so your acts may be honest, truthful and done wholly for God.

At night the hypocrite is exposed. The world may be hidden by the dark and shown clearly by the light of day, but at night the hypocrite stands revealed from the sincere.

“Since nobody is watching,” the hypocrite says to himself, “for whose sake should I pretend?”

Somebody is watching, but the hypocrite’s eyes are closed and cannot see that One.

In times of distress everyone calls for help—in times of toothache and earache, in doubt, fear and insecurity. In secret everyone calls out, hoping that One will hear and grant their requests. Privately, secretly, people perform good deeds to ward off weakness and restore their strength, trusting that Life will accept their gifts and efforts. When they are restored to health and peace of mind, then suddenly their faith leaves, and the phantom of anxiety soon returns.

"O God," they cry again, "we were in such a terrible state when, with all sincerity, we called upon you from our prison corner. For a hundred prayers you granted our requests. Now, freed of the prison, we are still as much in need. Bring us out of this world of darkness into that world of the prophets, the world of light. Why can freedom not come without prisons and pain? A thousand desires fill us, both good and deceitful, and the conflict of these phantoms brings a thousand tortures that leave us weary. Where is that sure faith that burns up all phantoms?"

God answers,

> *"The seeker of pleasure in you is your enemy and My enemy.*
> *Do not take your enemy and My enemy for a friend."*

When your pleasure-seeking self is imprisoned, filled with trouble and pain, then your freedom arrives and gathers strength. A thousand times you have proved that freedom comes to you out of toothache, headache and fear. Why then are you chained to bodily comfort? Why are you always occupied with tending the flesh? Do not forget the end of that thread: unravel those bodily passions till you have attained your eternal passion, and find freedom from the prison of darkness.

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## COMMENTARY:

*"The night is long, do not shorten it with your sleep."*

This quote from the Koran refers to a spiritual practice that Rumi taught his students: Dwelling in the remembrance of God all night. Avoiding sleep and putting aside everything else but contemplating the presence of Spirit.

At night, when we are by ourselves and the world is dark, nothing else stands between us and God. But holding our attention is not easy. Our mind pulls us into a continual stream of worries and fears, hopes and desires. We give the chattering of the mind way too much of our time and attention. In the end, attaining our desires causes us to forget, while the pain and suffering we experience often reminds us of what is most important. So, we spend all of our time running away from the things that help us, and we chase after the dreams that take us away from what Soul truly longs for.

Rumi is sharing here a technique for centering our attention, to attain the goal of dwelling in the remembrance of God all night: Practice tracing back the passions beneath each and every thought that captures your attention until you have plumbed the depths of each one and returned them to their source.

> *Unravel those bodily passions till you have attained*
> *your eternal passion, and find freedom from the prison of*
> *darkness.*

# Fourteen

SHEIKH IBRAHIM SAYS: "Whenever Saif-al-Din Farrukh orders someone to be given a beating, he immediately occupies himself until the beating is over so that no one can intercede."

Rumi says: Whatever you see in this world corresponds exactly with what is in the world beyond. All these realities are samples of the other Reality. Whatever exists in this world has come from there.

The bald man of Baalbek carried on his head trays and samples of various herbs—a pinch of pepper, a pinch of mastic, a pinch from every heap. The heaps were infinite, but there was no room on his tray for more. People are like the bald man of Baalbek, they are loaded with pinches and pieces out of the treasuries of God, some known and some hidden—a piece of hearing, a piece of speech, a piece of reason, a piece of generosity, a piece of knowledge. For this reason our work is always a reflection of God.

There are beings who are hawkers of God. Night and day they fill trays. By day you spend away your portion to make your living; by night these beings replenish your tray.

For instance, in the other world there are sights and visions of many kinds. A sample of those has been sent to you to see in this world. Sight is not limited to this world only, but the human body cannot bear more than this.

Thousands of people, generation after generation, have come and filled themselves from that Sea, returning again and again. That source is infinite. The longer we stay upon that Infinite Sea, the colder our heart grows for this world of samples.

This world is coined in that Mint and must return to that Mint again. All our parts have issued from that Mint, are samples of that Mint, and must return again—small and great, for all living creatures. Yet upon the tray of this world, life becomes visible; without the tray it is not visible.

That infinite world is a subtle world and does not reveal itself openly—yet look how wonderfully it makes its appearance here! Don't you see how the spring breeze becomes visible through the trees and grasses, the rose-beds and sweet herbs? With the swaying of fields and flowers you witness the beauty of spring. But when you look upon the breeze itself, you see nothing. This doesn't mean the beauty of those rose-beds is outside the subtle reality of the breeze. The spring breeze contains images of swaying rose-beds and sweet herbs, but those images are hidden and invisible. Only through the medium of form is their subtlety revealed.

Likewise in the human being these qualities are hidden and only become manifest through an inward or outward medium; one person through speech, another through work, another during times of war or peace. You cannot see these attributes within yourself—look and you will find nothing there—so you believe yourself empty of these infinite attributes. These attributes do not come forth and change you into something else from what you were. Rather, these qualities are hidden in you, like the water in the sea.

Water cannot leave the sea except through the sun's heat in the form of a cloud; it doesn't become visible except in waves. Your wave is a commotion that becomes visible within you, but so long as the sea is still, you see nothing. Your body is on the shore of the sea, and Soul is a part of the ocean itself. Do you not see how many fishes, snakes, birds, and creatures of all kinds come forth and show themselves, and then return to the sea? Your attributes such as patience, friendship, loyalty and the rest, come forth from this sea.

These qualities are subtle lovers of God. You can only glimpse them through the medium of the tongue. But because of their subtlety, without speech they are naked and retreat back out of sight into the arms of God.

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## COMMENTARY:

Sheikh Ibrahim, a follower of Shams-i-Tabriz, was discussing with some of Rumi's students the interesting practice of Saif-al-Din Farrukh, who occupied himself inwardly when ordering a beating. There was something about this that seemed both intriguing, yet odd. It seems to be an act of devotion and purification, but at the same time he used it to hide from the harshness of what he was doing. The contradiction bothered the students. So, they put the matter before Rumi.

Rumi didn't answer whether such a practice was good or bad, as they were trying to decide. Instead he delved into what made the matter so interesting. In other words, once again, Rumi looks beneath the surface to address the deeper issue.

His answer: We sense something true in what Farrukh does because we can see in it a reflection of the inner reality. Everything in this world carries pinches from the spice tray of Truth. This inner link is a part of all things, because all things in some way derive from that source. But Farrukh's practice seems odd because it is incomplete. It is only a piece of the whole. It is just a pinch and, therefore, only partially true.

All of life in this world is exactly like this. Inspirations come to us and become the goals and practices of our life, but they are just parts of a whole. Where do they come from? Where are they taking us?

They emerge from the depths within us, like creatures from the sea, stirring the stillness within us like a sudden commotion of feeling or desire. We don't even realize such things exist within us until they unexpectedly appear. Who are we? What are we made of?

We can't see the whole of life with our physical eyes because it is invisible, yet we can see the wind by how the fields and flowers sway. We can glimpse a person through their words. Look carefully into all these pinches and you can see the fullness of life from where they come.

Witness with eyes that see the whole—the eyes of Soul. Then all these bits and pieces of Truth make sense. This is the lesson that Rumi sees lurking in the story of Saif-al-Din Farrukh.

# Fifteen

WITHIN PEOPLE there is a longing and a desire such that, even if a hundred thousand worlds were theirs to own, still they would find no rest or comfort. They try every trade and craft, studying astronomy, medicine, and every other subject, but they reach no completion, for they have not found their true desire.

Poets call the Beloved "heart's ease," because there the heart finds ease. How can we find peace and rest in anything but the Beloved?

All these pleasures and pursuits are like a ladder. The rungs of a ladder are not a place to make one's home; they are for passing by. Fortunate are those who learn this. The long road becomes short for them. They do not waste their lives upon the steps.

Someone asks: "The Mongols have seized property by force, and from time to time they give this property back to us. This is a strange situation. Is it lawful to accept this property? What is your ruling?"

Rumi answers: Whatever the Mongols seize and give up returns into the grasp and treasury of God. For example, when you fill a jug or a barrel from the river and carry it away, that becomes your property. So long as it is in the jug or barrel, nobody has the right to interfere. Whoever takes the jug without permission is guilty of theft. But once you pour the water back into the river, it passes out of your ownership and is lawful for anyone to take once again. So our property is unlawful to them, while their property is lawful to us since by their giving it up they have returned it to the treasury of God.

Someone says: "When the Mongols first came to these parts they were naked and bare. They rode on bullocks and their weapons were made of wood. Now they are sleek and well-fed, they have splendid Arab horses and carry fine arms."

Rumi says: When they were desperate and weak and had no strength, God helped them and answered their prayer. Now, when they are so powerful and mighty, God is destroying them with the comforts of the feeblest, so they will realize it was through God's bounty and support that they captured the world, and not by their own force and power.

They used to live in a wilderness, far from civilization, without means, poor, naked and needy. By chance, some of them came to trade in the territory of the Khvarizmshah. They began to buy and sell, purchasing muslin to clothe their bodies. The Khvarizmshah stopped them, ordering them to be put to death, and forcing payment from the rest of them. The Mongols went humbly before their king, saying, "They have killed us." Their king asked for ten days, and then entered a deep cave where he fasted and humbled himself. On the tenth day a proclamation came from God, "I have accepted your supplication. Come forth! Wherever you go, you shall be victorious." So it was. When they came forth, by God's command they won the victory and captured the world.

Someone says: "The Mongols also believe in the resurrection and say that there will be a judgment."

Rumi says: They lie, desiring to be accepted by Muslims. If they really believe in the resurrection, where is the evidence to prove it? This is like the camel that was asked, "Where are you coming from?" The camel replied, "From the baths." The retort came, "Yes, we can see that clearly by your dirty knees."

The sins, wrongs, and evils they commit are like snow and ice piled together as high as a mountain. When the thought of the resurrection comes to us, like the sun it melts those snows of sinfulness as the sun in the heaven melts anything hard. How can the summer sun come and leave the snow and ice of winter intact? Seeing their snow and ice piled heap upon heap is proof that the sun has not shone upon them.

Although God has promised that all good and evil will be rewarded justly on the last day, yet a sample of this comes to pass every moment and in every instant. If happiness enters into someone's heart, that is his or her reward for making another happy. If they become sorrowful, it is because they have brought sorrow to another. These are gifts from the other world and tokens of that day of rewards, so that by these little things we may come to understand those great matters, just as a handful of corn is offered as a token of the whole heap.

The Prophet, for all his majesty and greatness, one night felt pain in his hand. It was revealed to him that this pain was the effect of a pain in the hands of 'Abbas. For he had taken 'Abbas captive and had bound his hands together with all the prisoners. Although the tying of his hands was done at God's order, still the Prophet had to suffer.

These troubles and depressions that come to you are the effect of some injury and wrong you have committed. Even if you cannot remember in detail what you have done, still from the results you can know the deed. You may not remember whether it came from your own negligence or ignorance, or because others swayed you into wrongful action. But look at the results: how much did you fall from grace, or how much has your heart expanded? Certainly a fall from grace is the response of disobedience to God, and expansion of the heart is the reward of obedience. Why, the Prophet himself was rebuked because he turned a ring on his finger. He was told, "We did not create you for idleness and play." From this decide for yourself whether your day is passed in obedience or disobedience.

Moses was occupied with the affairs of his people. Although he was at God's command and completely served God, yet one side of him was occupied with humanity for the general good. Khadir was occupied with God completely; he hid himself from the sight of others. Mohammad was occupied at first wholly with God, then he was told, "Call the people. Counsel them and reform them." Mohammad wept and lamented, saying, "Oh, my Lord, what sin have I committed? Why do you drive me from Your presence? I have no desire for this world." God said to him, "Mohammad, do not despair, I will not abandon you. Even in the midst of others you shall be with Me. When you are occupied with people, not one hair of the head of this hour with Me, not one, will be taken from you. In whatever work you are engaged, you will be in very union with Me."

Someone asks: "The eternal decrees that God has predestined, do they ever change?"

Rumi answers: How could God say, "Do evil to find good?" If someone sows wheat, can they gather barley? Or if they sow barley, will they gather wheat? That is impossible. All the saints and prophets have said that good is the reward of good, evil the reward of evil.

> *"And whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it."*

Someone interjects: "But we see wicked people turn virtuous, and virtuous people turn wicked."

Rumi responds: Well, those wicked men and women did some good, or thought good things, which brought them virtue. And those virtuous people did some evil act, or contemplated evil things, turning them wicked.

Someone asks: If a man takes a vow to fast for a day, if he breaks that vow, must he atone for that?

Rumi answers: According to the Shafi'i code, atonement is required, even for a single statement. That vow is the same as an oath to another, according to them, and whoever breaks an oath must make amends.

According to Abu Hanifa, however, a vow does not carry the same meaning as an oath to another person, so atonement is not necessary.

As I see it, there are two kinds of vows: Unconditional vows and qualified vows. An unconditional vow is when someone says, "It is my required duty to fast for a day." A qualified vow is when someone says, "If my health is restored, I should fast."

Take the example of a man who lost his donkey. For three days he fasted, hoping he would find his ass. After three days he finds his donkey, but it is dead. He lifts his face to heaven and says, "If, instead of these three days that I just fasted, I gave up six days of not eating during Ramadan, I would not be considered a Muslim. Are you trying to make a profit out of me?" His fasting to find his donkey, however, was a qualified vow. Fasting during Ramadan is unconditional. These are two different things.

Someone asks: "What is the meaning of the saying, 'Blessings upon the Prophet'?"

Rumi answers: It means that our acts of adoration, service, and worship do not belong to us. They come from God. Just like the season of spring brings the planting of seeds, and jaunts into the wilderness. All of these are the gift and bounty of spring. Without spring we would never experience this enjoyment.

The people of this world see secondary causes and think they are the origins of everything. God's saints see reality as it is created and comes into being. They know secondary causes are only veils that prevent people from seeing what the true Source really is. Like someone speaking from behind a curtain and people thinking it was the curtain that spoke, not realizing the curtain had nothing to do with it and was simply a veil. As soon as the person who was speaking emerges from behind the curtain, then it becomes clear that the curtain was only an excuse.

The saints see behind causes to the true purposes they were created for. For example, a camel comes forth from a mountain; Moses' staff turns into a serpent; out of solid rock twelve fountains spring forth; without any instrument Mohammad splits the moon; Adam comes into existence without any mother or father, Jesus is born without a father, out of a fire appears roses and a garden for Abraham, and so on and so on. Seeing the origins of life, saints realize that all these miracles are veils that occupy the minds of common people. Only the Source matters to the saints.

God promised Zachariah, "I will give you a son." Zachariah cried, "I am an old man, and my wife is old. My instrument of lust has become feeble, and my wife can no longer conceive. Lord, how can a son be born?"

The answer came, "Take heed Zachariah! You have lost the clue. I have shown you a hundred thousand times that actualities have no causes. This very moment, I could produce out of you a hundred thousand sons without a wife and without pregnancy. Indeed, if I make the sign, a whole people will come forth, completely formed and grown. Did I not bring your true Self into being in the world of spirits without a mother or father? Why do you forget these things?"

The rank and substance of the prophets and saints and the many states of humanity can be set forth in a parable: Slaves are brought out of the heathen lands into the realm of Muslimdom, where they are sold. Some are taken at the age of five years, some are ten, and some are fifteen years old. Those brought here as children, having been nurtured for years amongst Muslims, have completely forgotten their homeland. No trace of it remains in their memory. Those who arrive here a little older remember a little. Those much older remember much more.

In the world beyond, all are in the Presence of God. The food and sustenance there is the speech of God, without letters and without sounds. Those who are brought into this world as children, when they hear that Speech, remember nothing of their former state and see themselves as strangers to that Speech. They are veiled from God, being wholly sunk in forgetfulness. Some remember a little bit, and the longing and yearning for the other side is quickened in them. They seek out Truth. They are the believers. Some, when they hear that Speech, the Presence of God becomes manifest before their eyes, even as it was long ago. The veils are entirely removed, and they are joined in that union. These are the prophets and the saints.

Now I say this to you earnestly, when the brides of heavenly truth show their faces within you and their secrets are revealed, beware, do not tell this to strangers. Do not describe what you have witnessed to others, and do not tell everyone these words of mine.

> *"Do not impart wisdom to those not worthy, lest you do wisdom wrong. And, do not withhold from the worthy, lest you do them wrong."*

If a fair and adorable lover surrenders to you privately in your house, saying, "Show me to no one, for I belong only to you," it would never be proper for you to parade her in the bazaars and to call out, "Come and see this beauty!" That would never be agreeable to such an adorable one. She would be enraged against you.

God has made these words unlawful to some. Even so, dwellers in Hell cry out to dwellers in Paradise, saying, "Where is your generosity and your humanity? Out of those gifts and bounties God has given you, out of charity and common kindness, if you sprinkle just a little upon us, would that be so difficult? We are burning and melting in this fire. Out of those fruits, or out of those clear waters of Paradise, if you sprinkle a drop or two upon our souls, how hard would that be?"

The dwellers in Paradise answer, "God has forbidden that to you. The seed of this bliss came from our earlier deeds. Since you did not sow and cultivate with faith, sincerity, and good works, what should you gather here? Even if out of generosity we should share with you, since it is not your reward, it would burn your throats and stick in your gullets."

A crowd of hypocrites and strangers came into the presence of Mohammad. They began to talk about mysteries and praised the Prophet. Mohammad turned to his companions and said, "Cover up your vessels." He meant, "Conceal wisdom from strangers, and in their presence stop up your mouths and tongues, for they are mice and not worthy of this wisdom and grace."

The Amir who has just left our company—though he did not understand in detail what we were saying, yet he realizes in general that we were calling him to God. I take the wagging of his head, his smile of affection and his flush of passion as a sign of his understanding. If people from the country come into the city and hear the call to prayer, though they do not know in detail the meaning of the call, still they understand its purpose.

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## COMMENTARY:

From the last paragraph we can see how Rumi weighs the state of his listeners to give them only what they are ready to hear. Each person is at a particular place in their spiritual unfoldment, so their needs are each different.

It does no good to offer people truth until they first know how to appreciate it. In fact, truth could harm them if they are not prepared: They might react against the things beyond their understanding. They might take a stance that prevents them from seeing a greater realization.

> *Even if out of generosity we should share with you, since it is not your reward, it would burn your throats and stick in your gullets.*

In other words, the idea that there are universal spiritual truths that everyone must learn is not completely true. This thinking can lead us away from the important lessons facing us in this moment and through our situation. Wherever we might be, there is something specific for us to learn. These are the steps that lead to true universal understanding.

This means that the spiritual path is not an intellectual study. It is not about ideas and theories or memorizing laws and principles. It is a change that takes place organically at the core of our being.

> *The rungs of a ladder are not a place to make one's home;*
> *they are for passing by. Fortunate are those who learn this.*
> *The long road becomes short for them, and they do not waste*
> *their lives upon the steps.*

It is not the lessons that are important. It is the way we are changed by them. No longer can we go back to being a child again, after we have grown spiritually. As Rumi says elsewhere, the ripe grape can never become unripe again. It is just as if veils were removed from our eyes, which we never knew were there, and our capacity to see expands. We are no longer the same. But how can we give such wisdom to others? They, too, must pass through the steps and be changed by them, just as we have.

Our desires seem endless. No sooner do we gain the things we dearly need, than we realize we want more. This happens, says Rumi, because we have not yet found our true desire. None of these things can ever replace what we find in the Beloved.

So many people mistake their pleasures for their goals. They want to own and possess the rungs on the ladder. They stop there and call it their home.

Rumi is describing one of the greatest challenges of the spiritual path: How often do we stop growing when we think we have attained something important? How often do we forget to look forward to our next lesson? We become more interested in preaching about what we know, rather than listening and learning.

The more that applause of others moves us, the more we think this step on the ladder belongs to us. The more we try to possess it, the more we hold ourselves back. Sooner or later, our desire for success leads us to stop upon that rung and build a home.

This is why we should be thankful when the thirst for the Beloved arises. It comes to wake us up and remind us to leave everything else behind. Once again it is time to head into the great beyond. The road becomes short for those who learn this, because they are not sidetracked.

> *It means that our acts of adoration, service and worship do not belong to us. They come from God.*

Reverence for life is something that grows through Soul, but it does not come from us. It comes from something greater. It is a love that expands as we find ourselves drawn deeper and deeper into the arms of our Beloved. From this we realize that our desire for Truth is not our own. It is a seed that expands within us, but was planted by another hand.

# Sixteen

RUMI SAYS: Whoever is loved is beautiful, but this doesn't mean that whoever is beautiful is loved.

Beauty is a part of love, but lovableness is the root. If love exists then beauty must exist, because a part cannot exist separate from the whole. It is inherent in the whole.

"There are girls more beautiful than Laila," they used to tell Majnun. "Let us bring some to you."

"I do not love Laila for her form," Majnun would reply. "Laila is like a cup in my hand. I drink wine from that cup. I am in love with that wine. You only have eyes for the goblet and do not know the wine. A golden goblet studded with precious stones, but containing only vinegar, what use is that to me? An old broken gourd with wine is better in my eyes than a hundred goblets of gold."

People must be moved with passion and yearning for them to tell the wine from the cup. This is the same as someone who is hungry, who hasn't eaten for ten days, compared to another who has eaten five times a day. Both see a loaf of bread. The full one sees only more food, but the hungry person sees life, itself. To the hungry, this bread is a goblet, and the life it brings is wine. Such wine cannot be known except through hunger and yearning. Acquire this appetite so that you not only see the appearances of form, but find the Beloved everywhere.

The forms of this world are cups. Science, art, and knowledge are inscriptions upon the cup. When the cup is broken, those inscriptions disappear. Therefore, those who drink for the sake of the wine see "the eternal reality, the deeds of holiness. . . ."

Anyone asking a question must first become aware that their knowledge is incomplete, and secondly that there is wisdom beyond what they know. Hence, the saying, "Asking is half of knowing."

But there is always one in this world who knows. Everyone looks to someone, because, ultimately, we are looking for God. But there must always be one who can distinguish those who are hitting the mark from those who have been struck by the arrow of someone else's bow.

We say a person is drowned when the water has complete control of them and they have no control of the water. A drowned person and a swimmer are both in the water, but the former is carried along by the water, while the swimmer moves by his own strength and his own free will. The person absorbed by and drowned in the water—every act and word that springs forth from them—all this comes from the water, not them. They are only a veil.

If you hear words coming through a wall, you know the wall isn't speaking and that voice belongs to someone else. The saints are like this. They have died before death and have become like doors and walls. Not even a hair's tip of separate existence remains in them. In the hands of Reality, they are shields—but the shield doesn't move under its own power. Thus the saints say, "I am the Truth," meaning, "I am nothing at all, I move by the Hand of God." Look upon such shields as God. Do not take up violence against God. Striking blows against such shields is just like declaring war against God, Itself.

Every saint is God's proof. The rank and station of men and women are determined by how they treat the saint. If they are hostile to saints, they are acting hostile against God. If they befriend the saints, they have made friendship with God.

> *"Whoever has seen them has seen Me. Whoever finds them has found Me."*

God's saints are familiar with the secrets of His refuge. They have become intimate with the Divine Mysteries that "none but the purified shall touch." If they turn their backs on the tomb of a great saint, it is not out of disobedience or neglect. They have turned their faces toward that saint's essence, for these words spoken here are their essence. There is no harm in turning away from the body to face Soul.

It is a custom of mine that I want no heart to become distressed through me. During our meetings, sometimes a great multitude thrust themselves upon me and some of my friends try to fend them off. That disturbs me. I have said a hundred times, "Say nothing on my account. I am content with that." I care to such a degree that when such friends come to me, I dread the thought of boring them, so I speak poetry for their enjoyment. Otherwise, what do I care about poetry? By Allah, I care nothing for poetry. There is nothing worse in my eyes. To me, it is like the cook who plunges his hand into tripe, cleaning it out for the sake of a guest's appetite.

Merchants search to see what products are needed in their city, and what people want to buy. Then they buy and sell those goods and services, even if they are the lowest of things in their eyes. I have studied many sciences and taken pains to offer fine, rare, and precious things to scholars and researchers, clever ones and deep thinkers, who come to me. God has willed this. He gathered to me all the sciences and assembled here all the pains, so I would become occupied with this work. What can I do? In my own country, and amongst my own people, there is nothing more shameful than poetry. If I had remained there, I would have lived in harmony with their temperament. I would have practiced what they love, such as giving lectures, composing books and preaching.

The Amir says: "The root of the matter is action."

Rumi says: Where are such people of action, so that I can teach them action? But now look how you cock your ears, seeking after words instead of action. If I were to stop speaking now, you would become upset. Become a seeker of action, so that I can show you action!

I am looking all over the world for students of action so I can teach action. I am looking all over the world for anyone who knows action, but I find no students of action—only of words. So, I occupy myself with words. What do you know of action? Action is only known through action. There is not one traveler upon this road—it is empty—so how will anyone see if you are on the true path of action?

After all, prayer and fasting are not action; these are forms of action. Action is an inward reality. From the time of Adam to the time of Mohammad, prayer and fasting have changed their form, but action is still the same.

Action is not what people think it is. People believe action is this outward show. But if a hypocrite performs only the form of action, such as prayer or fasting, it gains him nothing, since a sincere desire for action was not present.

The secret principle of all things is speech and words. You do not yet know the true knowledge of speech and words, therefore you consider them unimportant. However, speech is fruit from the tree of action, for words are born of action. God created the world by a word.

You may have faith in your heart, but unless you share it through words, it is worth nothing. When you say, "In this present age words are of no account," you say this with words, do you not? If words are of no account, then why do we hear you say this with words?

Someone asks: "When we do a good deed, if we have hopes and expectations of a good reward from God, does that harm us?"

Rumi answers: By Allah, we must always have hope. Faith, itself, consists of fear and hope. Someone once asked me, "Hope itself is good, but what is this fear?" I said, "Show me a fear without hope, or a hope without fear. The two are inseparable." For example, a farmer plants wheat. Naturally he hopes that wheat will grow. At the same time he is afraid some blight or drought may destroy it. So, there is no hope without fear, or fear without hope.

Now, when we hope expectantly for a reward, we will surely work with greater effort. Expectation becomes our wings, and the stronger our wings the farther the flight. If, on the other hand we lose hope, we become lazy and of no value to anyone. A sick person will take bitter medicine and give up ten sweet pleasures, but if they have no hope for health, why would they endure this?

We are a mixture of animal and speech. If we do not speak outwardly, we still speak inwardly—we are constantly speaking. We are like a river in which clay is mixed; the pure water is our speech, while the clay is our animality. But the clay in us is an accident. Do you not see how those pieces of clay have crumbled and rotted away, while mankind's speech, poetry, and sciences—both bad and good—have remained?

The "man or woman of heart" is a universe. When you have seen them, you have seen all. "All game is in the belly of the wild ass." All creatures in this world are contained in the man and woman of heart.

*Good and evil, may dervishes be,*
*Whoever is not, no dervish are they.*

Once you have seen one who is the whole, surely you have seen the whole world. Whoever you see after is a mere repetition. That person's speech is contained in the words of the whole. Once you have heard their words, every word you hear thereafter is an echo.

*Whoever beholds such a one, in any place,*
*Has seen all men and women, all time and space.*

As the poet says:

*You are the true transcription of the Archetype Divine.*
*A glass through which the Sun's own loveliness does shine.*
*Within, or without, wherever it may lie,*
*Accept every desire, and declare: 'Tis I!'*

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## COMMENTARY:

What Rumi means by "saint" is not the traditional religious personage who is bathed in perfection and God's love, blessing people wherever they go. Such images are ideals, or perhaps even idols. They are not real people. This kind of deification usually takes place after someone dies, when it is easier to forget their shadows and mistakes. They then become symbols, placed up high on a pedestal like a stone statue, above everyone else. These are not the living saints that Rumi is speaking about.

To know what Rumi means, you must dance with him. Follow the steps he takes. He starts like this:

> *Whoever is loved is beautiful, but this doesn't mean that whoever is beautiful is loved.*

Love is what Rumi is looking for. To drink love like one who is parched with thirst. Spiritual water is his longing. Whoever possesses this life-bestowing Spirit becomes beautiful in our inner vision. From their form we draw sustenance. They are the saints.

> *A golden goblet studded with precious stones, but containing only vinegar, what use is that to me? An old broken gourd with wine is better in my eyes than a hundred goblets of gold.*

In other words, who cares what saints look like? They might be famous, or they might be unknown. They might be rich or poor, educated or illiterate. What difference would this make to one who is dying of hunger? All that matters is the nourishment we find through them.

> *Everyone looks to someone, because, ultimately, we are looking for God. But there must always be one who can distinguish those who are hitting the mark from those who have been struck by the arrow of someone else's bow.*

There are always teachers we learn from; just as we, too, teach others. But Rumi is referring to something else here. He is talking about those who know what it means to "hit the mark." These are the saints. They see the direction Life is moving in, and they recognize those who are searching to find the essence behind the ever-changing forms of Truth. The saints seek out these who look beneath the outward show to find the source of love.

This is different from "those who have been struck by the arrow of someone else's bow," which means people who are moved by new ideas or powerfully charged words. Being entranced by outer beauty or grand ideas is not the same as forsaking everything else for true love. These are worlds apart.

> *If you hear words coming through a wall, you know that*
> *wall isn't speaking and that voice belongs to someone else.*
> *The saints are like this.*

Such saints recognize the hitting of the mark because Spirit flows through them. It is not their own idea or their own opinion that matters. They observe Life as it is, and they see as God sees, you might say, because, after all, their perceptions come to them through God's vision.

Do not mistake their words as coming from them. It might be their voice that is speaking, but such spiritual love does not come from them.

> *The rank and station of men and women is determined by*
> *how they treat the saint.*

Those who recognize the living saints and draw life from them are connected spiritually to the teachings of the times. They ride these waves. Those who have not been influenced by the saints are adrift in the world of forms. Any direction seems the same as every other. They don't know where to turn. Those who pit themselves against saints are swimming against the currents of Life Itself. They are pulled beneath the sea by undertows they do not understand. This is why Rumi says that, without realizing it, people change the courses of their lives by how they treat those who are aligned with Truth.

Therefore, across the faces of the saints we see all people, whether lost or awake, whether for or against them. The lives of all men and women can be found in such Lovers of God, because they are not something separate. They are not an ideal. They are woven from the same fabric. The only difference is that they realize this and have turned away from the struggles of mankind to face God. Unless you can find the hopes and fears of the world flitting across their face like reflections from the flames of a fire, you have not found a true saint.

This is why Rumi says:

*Good and evil, may dervishes be,*
*Whoever is not, no dervish are they.*

So, we have now followed the steps of Rumi's dance of the saints and can see why all of humanity is contained within them. But why does Rumi then say,

*There is not one traveler upon this road—it is empty—so*
*how will anyone see if you are on the true path of action?*

Not a single person can be found following the path of action because it cannot be followed. It is not a path. It is only doing. Pure action is the work of the saints, but there are none who follow it. It is a state of pure being, not a state that can be followed.

The day when words become like tripe to us, is the day when we realize that we are not speaking for ourselves. Our speech then becomes action. Others may follow such poetry, they may see the beauty of it, but the words, themselves, are calling out to people who long for action. Such language moves us in step with the hidden work of Life.

*I am looking all over the world for students of action so*
*that I can teach action. I am looking all over the world for*
*anyone who knows action, but I find no students of action—*
*only of words. So, I occupy myself with words.*

The spiritual path is a path of speech that inspires and touches us. It leads us to an inner action beyond leaders and followers. But the words can only hint at such spiritual beingness. There is no way to describe the reality of it. We must experience it. Then we know that it is what it is.

# Seventeen

THE AMIR OF RUM SAYS: “The unbelievers used to worship and bow down to idols. Now we are doing the selfsame thing. We go and bow down and wait upon the Mongols, and yet we consider ourselves Muslims. We have many other idols in our heart too, such as greed, passion, temper, envy, and we are obedient to all of them. So we act in the very same way as the unbelievers, both outwardly and inwardly, and we consider ourselves Muslims!”

Rumi answers: But here is something different; it enters your thoughts that this conduct is wrong and utterly detestable. The eye of your heart has seen something incomparably greater that shows up this behavior as vile and hideous. Brackish water shows its brackishness to one who has tasted sweet water. Things are made clear by their opposites.

So God has implanted in Soul the light of faith to see these things as repulsive. Confronted by beauty, they appear ugly. Yet others are not affected this way. They are perfectly happy in their existing state, saying, “This is absolutely fine.”

God will grant you your heart’s desire—where your ambition is, that will be yours. “The bird flies with its wings, the believers fly with their aspiration.”

There are three kinds of creatures. First there are angels, who are pure spiritual conscience. Worship, service, and the remembrance of God are their nature and their food. They eat and live upon that essence. Like fish in the water, their mattress and pillow are the water. Angels are pure and free of lust, so what favor do they gain by not yielding to such desires? Since they are free of these things, they have no struggle against them. If they obey God's will it is not counted as obedience, for this is their nature, and they cannot be otherwise.

Second are the beasts who are pure sensuality, having no spiritual conscience to restrain them. They, too, are under no burden of obligation.

Lastly, there remains the poor human being, who is a compound of spiritual conscience and sensuality. We are half angel, half beast. Half snake, half fish. The fish draws us toward water, the snake toward the earth. We are forever in battle. If our spiritual conscience overcomes our sensuality, we are higher than the angels. If our sensuality overcomes our spiritual conscience, we are lower than the beasts.

> *"The angel is saved through knowledge, the animal—*
> *through ignorance. Between the two struggle the people of*
> *this world."*

Now, some have followed their spiritual conscience so faithfully that they have become entirely angels and pure Light. They are the prophets and the saints. They are freed of fear and hope. In some, lust has overcome their spiritual conscience so entirely that they have taken on the status of animals. Some are still struggling. These last are the people who feel within themselves an agony and anguish, a sorrow and longing. They are not satisfied with their lives. These are the believers. The saints are waiting to bring them to their own station, to make them like themselves, just as the satans, too, are waiting to draw them to the lowest of the low.

> *"When God's help comes through victory, and you see people*
> *submitting to His Will in throngs, then fill yourself with the*

*presence of the Lord, and seek His forgiveness; for God turns to men and women again."*

Now, commentators offer an outward interpretation to the above Sura, from the Koran, as follows: Mohammad had the dream, "I will make all the world Muslims and bring them to the path of God." When he saw his death approaching he cried, "Ah, didn't I come into this life to call the people to God?" God answered, "Do not grieve. In that very hour when you pass away, provinces and cities which you would conquer by armies and by the sword I will convert to obedience and to the faith, every one of them without armies. The sign of this will come at the end when you are dying, you will see people entering in throngs and becoming Muslims. When this sign comes, know that the time for your departure has arrived. Then give praise, and seek forgiveness."

However, there is an inward meaning to this Sura: People think they can drive away evil by great effort and striving. After struggling and exhausting all their powers and means, they fall into despair. Then God says to them: "You thought you could achieve this goal through your own power, action and work. This is the law I have laid down: Whatever you possess, spend it in Our name. Then Our grace will supervene.

"You must journey upon this infinite road with the feeble hands and feet that you possess. We know well that with feet so feeble you can never accomplish this journey. Indeed, in a hundred thousand years you will not be able to accomplish a single stage of this journey. But even as you collapse and fall, with no strength left to struggle farther, then Our loving breath will carry you on. Even a child, so long as it is a suckling, is carried in the arms, but when it is grown it is set free to walk. Now in this hour when your powers have left you, when your own means fail, behold Our graces, Our gifts, and Our love. You will not witness even an atom of such blessings after a hundred thousand strivings."

I do not love or bow down to the Amir on account of worldly considerations, for his rank, learning, or achievements. Others love him for those reasons, not seeing the Amir's face, but only his back. The Amir is like a mirror with precious pearls on its back, with gold inlaid. Those who love gold and pearls look at the back of the mirror, but those who love life always look upon the mirror, and love the mirror for itself. They do not grow weary of the fair beauty they see. But those with a hideous face full of blemishes see in the mirror only ugliness. They quickly turn the mirror and look for those precious stones. Yet what harm is done to the face of the mirror if its back is studded with a thousand kinds of engravings and precious stones?

*"Things are made clear by their opposite."*

It is impossible to know anything without its opposite, yet God has no opposite. "I was a hidden treasure," God says, "and I wanted to be known." So It created this world of darkness for Its Light to become visible. So, too, It manifested the prophets and the saints, saying, "Go forth with My Attributes into My creation." They are the theater for the Light of God, where friend may be disclosed from foe, and brother from stranger. The struggles of the saints reveals God's opposite, even though It has none. Through persecution and opposition, the saints become known and admired.

> *"With their mouths, the unbelievers try to extinguish the Light of God. But God will perfect His Light through their adversity."*

God chastises some people through wealth, gold, and rulership, for Soul flees from such possessions. Shams saw a prince riding in Arabia, on his brow the illumination of the prophets and saints. Shams said, "Glory be to God who chastises His servants by means of affluence!"

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## COMMENTARY:

This message from Rumi to the Amir is the message of God to Soul: Know that this longing you have and this desire in your heart is what makes you special.

You may have human failings and you may struggle against your own base nature, but if you recognize the need within for something more, know that it is planted by God's own hand and is proof that you are on the path.

Spiritual realization cannot be accomplished by our own effort alone. Therefore, you can't compare anyone spiritually by their outer circumstances. Through failures we gain something priceless. Worldly success is merely another lesson that forces us to dig deeper to remember our true purpose.

We can't judge ourselves or others by appearances, but we do learn about Truth by experiencing its opposite.

# Eighteen

SOMEONE SAYS: “Ibn Muqri recites the Koran correctly.”

Rumi says: Yes, he recites the form of the Koran correctly, but he has no knowledge of its meaning. This is proven by the fact that when he is questioned for an explanation, he cannot answer. He recites blindly. He is like a man who holds an old, tattered sable in his hand; he is offered a newer, finer sable, but he refuses it. So we can see that he doesn’t know what sable really is. Someone told him that this is sable, and he blindly accepts it.

It is like children playing with walnuts. Offer them the nut itself, or the oil of the walnut, and they refuse it, saying, “The walnut is what we spin on the table. This doesn’t spin.” God’s treasuries are many, and God’s sciences are many. If he recites this Koran with knowledge, why does he reject the other eternal Koran?

I once explained to a Koran-teacher: The Koran says, “If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Lord are spent.” Now, with fifty drams of ink one can copy the whole of this Koran. Therefore, the Koran is only a symbol of God’s knowledge and all the knowledge belonging to God.

An apothecary puts a pinch of medicine in a piece of paper. You wouldn't say, "The whole of the apothecary's shop is in this paper." That would be foolishness. After all, in the time of Moses and Jesus and the other prophets, the Koran existed. God's speech existed, but it was not in Arabic. I explained this to the Koran-teacher in this way, but I could see that it made no impression so I let him go.

It is related that during the time of the Prophet anyone who knew one Sura by heart, or half a Sura, was called a great person and pointed out, "They have a Sura by heart," since in that day they devoured the Koran. To devour a loaf of bread, or two loafs, is certainly a great accomplishment. But people who put bread in their mouths without chewing it and spit it out again can devour thousands of tons in that way.

Still, this is a good thing. God has sealed the eyes of some people so they can cultivate this present world. If no one were blind to the other world, this world would be empty. It is this blindness that gives rise to culture and progress. Consider children, how they grow up recklessly and become tall, but when their judgment reaches maturity they stop growing. So the cause and reason for civilization is blindness, and the cause of devastation is sight.

What I am saying is motivated by one of two things: Either I speak out of envy, or I speak with compassion. God forbid that it should be envy! It is stupid to envy even those who are worthy of envy, so, how can we envy one who is not worthy? No, I speak out of great compassion and mercy, for I wish to draw you into the true meaning.

A story is told of a man on the way to the pilgrimage who collapsed in the desert, overcome by thirst. Suddenly he saw in the distance a small and tattered tent. He struggled there, and seeing a young girl, he cried aloud, "I am a guest! I have attained my goal!"

Saying this, he sat down and asked for water. She brought him water that was hotter than fire and more brackish than salt, and from lip to throat it burned every part. The man, out of extreme compassion, addressed the woman.

"I am indebted to you for what relief you have given me," he said. "Compassion has welled up within me. Listen to what I say to you. Behold, Baghdad is nearby, and Kufa and Wasit and the rest. There you will find plenty of sweet, cool water, foods of various kinds, baths, luxuries, rich delights." And he described the pleasures of those cities.

A moment later the Bedouin came on the scene who was the woman's husband. He had caught a few brace of desert rats, which he told the woman to cook. They offered some to the guest, who being in such desperate straits ate them. After that, in the middle of the night, the guest slept outside the tent. The woman spoke to her husband.

"Did you hear all the stories our guest had to tell?" And she repeated to her husband the guest's entire account.

"Don't listen to these things," the Bedouin answered. "There are many envious people in the world. When they see others living a life of ease and abundance, they envy them and want to send them wandering away to deprive them of their fortune."

So it is with many people. When anyone out of pure compassion offers them a piece of advice, they see it as envy. But if there are roots in a person, in the end they will turn their face to the truth. If, since the day of the Primordial Covenant a drop has been sprinkled upon them, in the end that drop will deliver them out of all confusion and misery. Come then! How long will you be remote from us and estranged? How long locked up in confusion and sadness? And what should we say to people who have never heard stories like this before, even from their own teacher?

*Since greatness never graced their forebears,*
*They cannot bear to hear the great ones praised.*

Although facing the truth is not attractive at first, the longer one follows it the sweeter it becomes. This is the opposite of outward forms that charm us at first, but the longer you sit with them thinking they are all there is, the colder you become. What is the form of the Koran compared with its meaning? Examine a man or woman: What is their form compared to their meaning? If the sense of that person departs, we wouldn't let them loose in our house for one moment.

Our Master, Shams, once told this story: A great caravan was on its way to a distant city. Along the way they found a certain place with no sign of habitation or water. Suddenly they came upon a well with no bucket. So they took a kettle and some rope and lowered this kettle into the well. They drew up the rope, but the kettle broke away. They sent down another, but it broke away too. After that they tied people from the caravan with a rope and lowered them down into the well, but they disappeared as well.

Now there was a man of great heart present. He said, "I will go down." They lowered him down. He was nearly to the bottom of the well when a terrible black creature suddenly appeared.

"I will never escape," the man thought. "But at least let me keep my wits about me and not lose my senses, so that I can see what is going to happen."

"Don't make a long story of it," the black creature said. "You're my prisoner. You won't escape unless you give me the right answer. Nothing else will save you."

"Ask on," said the man.

"Where is the best place?" the creature asked.

"I am a prisoner and helpless," the man reflected. "If I say Baghdad or some other place, I might insult his own hometown." Then he spoke aloud, "The best place to live is wherever we feel at home. If that is in the bowels of the earth, then that's the best place. If it's in a mouse hole, then that's the best place."

"Well said, well said!" cried the creature. "You've escaped. You're one in a million. Now I've let you go, and set free the others on account of your blessing. From this time forward I'll shed no more blood. I bestow this gift on all the people of the world out of love for you."

Then he gave the people of the caravan water to satisfy their needs.

The purpose of this story is contained in its inner meaning. We can give out the same meaning in another form, but lovers of tradition accept this parable. It is difficult to speak with them. If we speak these very same words in another form they will not listen.

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## COMMENTARY:

In other words, Rumi is asking us to listen carefully and look beneath the surface of his words. There is an inner meaning behind his stories, just as there is an inner purpose behind all of life. He has clothed his teaching in a form so that others familiar with traditional ideas can accept it and enjoy it, but his message also carries a hidden substance that is a part of the great ocean of Soul. Our human self hears and enjoys his stories, but he is also speaking to the deeper part of Self that recognizes there is nothing conventional or traditional in anything he says.

# Nineteen

RUMI SAYS: Someone said to Taj al-Din Quba'i, "These scientists of divinity live among us and deprive the people of their religious beliefs."

Taj al-Din Quba'i answered, "They do not live amongst us and take away our beliefs. God forbid they could ever be one of us. If you put a golden collar on a dog, do you call it a hunting dog because of that collar? The quality of being a hunting dog is something specific in the animal, whether it wears a collar of gold or wool."

No one becomes a scholar because of the robe and turban. Scholarship is a virtue in its very essence, and whether clothed in tunic or overcoat, it makes no difference.

Thus, in Mohammad's time, the hypocrites used to put on prayer-robes to lure Muslims away from the Faith. How could they lead astray Muslims until they dressed up as Muslims, themselves? If a Christian or a Jew criticized Islam, who would listen to them?

*"Woe to those that pray,*
*Yet do not listen to their own prayers,*
*Or to those who make big displays,*
*But for others have no care."*

But these are merely words. You have caught that Light but still have not found humanity. Seek humanity: that is your true purpose. The rest is mere long-windedness. When words are elaborately decorated, their purpose is forgotten.

A certain greengrocer was in love with a woman, and he sent messages by the lady's maid.

"I am like this, I am like that. I am in love, I am on fire. I find no peace. I am cruelly treated. I was like this yesterday. Last night such and such happened to me." And he recited long, long stories.

The maid came into the lady's presence and addressed her as follows:

"The greengrocer sends you greetings and says, 'Come, so that I may do this and that to you.'"

"So coldly?" the lady asked.

"He spoke at great length," answered the maid. "But that was his purpose."

The purpose is the root of the matter; the rest is merely a headache.

## COMMENTARY:

Fancy words won't change their substance.

Dressing a person up as a scholar and authority figure doesn't change who they are.

Get to the heart of the matter and ignore the rest.

# Twenty

RUMI SAYS: Night and day you are at war, attempting to reform the character of the opposite sex, to cleanse their impurity and to correct their faults. It is better to cleanse yourself through them than trying to cleanse them through yourself. Reform yourself by means of them. Go to them and accept whatever they say, even if from your viewpoint their words seem absurd or unfair.

It was on account of this truth that Mohammad said, "There is no monkhood in Islam." The way of monks is solitude, dwelling in mountains, men not living with women, and giving up the world. God showed the Prophet a straight and hidden way. What is that way? Marriage: so that we can endure the trials of living with the opposite sex, to listen to their demands, for them to ride roughshod over us, and so in this way to refine our own character.

By enduring and putting up with the tyranny of your spouse it is as though you rub off your own impurity on them. Your character becomes good through forbearance; their character becomes bad through domineering and aggression. Once you realize this, make yourself clean. Know that they are like a garment; in them you can cleanse your own impurities and become clean yourself.

Rid yourself of pride, envy, and jealousy, until you experience pleasure in struggling and enduring. Through their demands discover spiritual joy. After that, you will endure such struggles. You will stop running from oppression, since you will see the advantages it brings to you.

It is related that Mohammad returned with his Companions from a raid one night. He told them to beat the drum saying, "Tonight we will sleep at the gate of the city and enter tomorrow." They asked, "Messenger of God, why don't we return to our homes now?" He said, "You might see your wives in bed with strange men. You would be hurt, and a commotion would arise." One of the Companions did not hear; he entered and found his wife with a stranger.

The way of the Prophet is this: It is necessary to endure pain to rid ourselves of selfishness, jealousy, and pride. To experience the pain of our spouses' extravagant desires, the pain of unfair burdens, and a hundred thousand other pains beyond all bounds, so the spiritual path can become clear. The way of Jesus was wrestling with solitude and not gratifying lust. The way of Mohammad is to endure the oppression and agonies inflicted by men and women upon each other. If you cannot go by the Mohammadan way, at least go by the way of Jesus, so you will not remain completely outside the spiritual path.

If you have the serenity to endure a hundred buffets, seeing the fruits and harvest that come through them, or believing in your hidden heart, "Though in this hour I see no harvest of these sufferings, in the end I will reach the treasures," you will reach the treasures, yes. More than you desired and hoped.

If these words have no effect upon you now, after a while when you become more mature they will leave a great impression. This is the difference between talking with your spouse and talking to a friend. Spouses will not change, no matter what you say. Your words have no affect on them. Indeed, they become more determined.

For instance, take a loaf of bread, put it under your arm, and deny it to others, saying, "I will not give this to anyone. Give it? Why, I won't even show it." Even if that loaf had been cast away and the dogs would not eat it because bread is so plentiful and cheap—yet the moment you begin to refuse it, everybody is after it and sets their hearts on it, pleading and protesting, "We want to see that bread which you refuse and keep hidden." Especially if you keep it hidden for a year, insisting emphatically that you will neither give it away nor show it, their eagerness for the loaf passes all bounds, since, "People are passionate for whatever they are denied."

The more you tell your spouse, "Keep yourself hidden," the greater their itch to flirt and show themselves. And being hidden, the opposite sex becomes more eager for them. So there you sit in the middle, augmenting eagerness on both sides, and you think of yourself as a reformer! Why, that is the very essence of corruption. If they have in them the natural quality to avoid evil, whether you prevent them or not, they will proceed according to their good temperament and pure constitution. So rest assured, and don't worry. If they are the opposite, they will still go their own way. Trying to stop them in reality does nothing but increases their eagerness.

Someone says: "We heard some men saying, 'We saw Shams-i-Tabriz, we really saw him.'"

Rumi says: Fools, where did they see him? Would you listen to someone who couldn't see a camel on the roof of their own house, if they come along and said to you, "I found a needle in the field and threaded it." That is a fine story, like the person who said, "Two things make me laugh—a black person painting their nails black, and a blind person putting their head out of the window." They are exactly like that. Blind inwardly, they put their heads out of the window of the physical body. What can they see? What does their approval or disapproval amount to?

First it is necessary to acquire inner sight. Then one can see. But even with sight, how can one see what is hidden? In this world there are saints who have achieved union, and other saints beyond those, called the Veiled Ones of God. The former saints are ever pleading humbly, "Oh Lord God, show us one of Thy Veiled Ones." Now as for those tavern-haunting braggarts, of course they cannot reach or see what their own boasting hides. How can one see the Veiled Ones of God, or know them without their will?

It is not an easy matter. Even the angels—who are not tempted by either wealth or rank, who have no veil to separate them, whose food is the pure Light and Beauty of God, whose eyes, keen and farsighted, see only pure Love—swing between favor and disfavor toward the people of this world. This is so that, during our moments of disgrace we might tremble and ask, "What have I become? What do I know?" And if some light should shine upon us and we should be graced by a certain joy, we might give thanks a thousandfold to God, saying, "How am I worthy of this?"

Submitting yourself in this way, you can experience great joy even from a word or a glimpse of Shams. For the sail on the ship of our being is our ideal. When there is a sail, the wind can carry us to mighty places. When there is no sail, all words are merely wind.

The lover-beloved relationship is very pleasant; everything between the two is sheer informality. All formalities are for the sake of others. I would give a great exposition of these words, but the hour is late, and one must labor very hard and dig out rivers to reach the pool of the heart. In this matter proofs cannot work. Here one must be a seeker of love, not an observer.

It might seem that I exaggerate the relationship of the lover, but this is not true. In fact, I see that disciples should give up their own purpose for the sake of their master's form.

*Thou whose form is fairer far than a thousand purposes are.*

Every disciple who comes to the master must first abandon his or her own purpose, being in need of the master.

Baha al-Din asks a question: "Surely they shouldn't abandon their own purpose for the sake of the master's form, but for the sake of the master's purpose?"

Rumi answers: That isn't possible. If this were so, then both would be masters. Now you must struggle to find the inward light, to escape and be secure from this fire of confusions. When you acquire such an inward light, all the desires of this world such as rank, honor, and title pass across your inward heart like a lightning flash. With worldlings, the rewards of the unseen world, such as the presence of God and yearning for the world of the saints', shine upon their hearts for a moment and then pass like a lightning flash. Therefore, it is rank, honor, and title they really seek. However, the people of God become wholly God's; their faces are turned to God. They are preoccupied with and absorbed in God. Worldly passions, like the lust of an impotent man, show briefly but do not take root and quickly pass away.

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## COMMENTARY:

Baha al-Din was Rumi's son. He would eventually grow up to carry on his father's teaching after Rumi passed away from this world. However, here we see him at the beginning of his spiritual training asking the same question that many students ask today: Why do we need to look to a Master or Teacher? Aren't his or her ideals what we should be learning? Shouldn't we be seeking the Teacher's wisdom and advice, not their form?

This leads us into one of the mysteries of the path that can only be understood by the heart after it has found a true Teacher.

*In this matter proofs cannot work.*

It cannot be learned by listening to a lecture or reading a book, because it is wisdom of a different order.

Psychologists tell us that we fall in love because we project our needs on others, but there is something more to be gained through love. Marriage and dedicating our self to another person as our mate opens up far more than just playing out our subconscious desires. Rumi explains how suffering for the sake of love helps us grow spiritually and discover treasures. We become a part of something larger than ourselves.

A relationship begins the moment we form a bond and hold sacred what we share between us. No one else can know the secret moments, the laughter and sorrow, the mutual experience, because they belong to no one else. They are something shared and owned by two in union, not separately. We cannot gain it on our own. We cannot open these treasures without another. These mysteries take two hands to unlock.

The meaning of love is not gained by reading or studying. It is something learned by following and dedicating ourselves to it. Love is both struggle and joy. It forces us to change for the sake of the relationship. If we cannot set aside our egos for love, we will never know its hidden rewards. We must merge into and become what it is. There is no other way to know it.

Finding a spiritual teacher is the same. It is not important what others think or say. It is whether our heart willingly sets aside its own desires to follow the inner form of the Master. This is how we discover the spiritual connection that changes us and reveals to us our own true self, as if the Master's form is a mirror for Soul.

Does it seem as if the Master, himself—not just his words or sayings—touches us inwardly and opens us to new states of consciousness? If our ideals, our beliefs, and our thoughts do not fall away on their own while standing in the presence of the Master's inward form, because that experience is real beyond any conceptions, then we have not yet found the inner teacher.

This step that Rumi is talking about, however, is not for beginners. It is a step that marks an advanced stage on the spiritual path. First, seekers need to listen and read, trying to understand the basic principles of the path. We should study the same way we would research any other subject. This is only preparation, however. Until we find a bond with the inner form of the Master, and commit to it, we will never know what the Inner Teacher is.

This is why Rumi said those braggarts could not have seen Shams, as they claimed. To them, Shams was a famous man. They saw something, but what they saw was not the Shams that Rumi knew. Rumi swam in the Ocean that was his teacher. He understood that no one could enter such depths without it changing them in every way, as it had changed him. It wouldn't be possible to brag of seeing Shams if they had truly seen him.

# Twenty-One

RUMI SAYS: Sharif Paysukhta has written:

*God dispenses Its grace,*
*Indifferent to time and space,*
*Itself, the Spirit of the Whole*
*Is independent of our soul.*
*No matter what our ranging thought*
*Within its compass may be brought,*
*We find adoration for the Lord,*
*For It who need not be adored.*

These words are shameful; they neither honor God, nor do they honor mankind. Oh poet, what joy does it give you that God should be supremely independent of you? This is not the language of friends; this is the language of enemies. The enemy indeed says, "I am indifferent to you and do not care."

Now consider loyal and ardent lovers of God who, when in states of ecstatic joy, address the Beloved, "You are independent of me!" They would be like a stoker of the fires at the baths, saying, "The Sultan is unconcerned and independent of me, a mere stoker. Indeed, the Sultan is indifferent to all stokers." What joy would such a miserable stoker feel with the thought that the king was indifferent to them? No, the right words for a stoker to speak would be: "I was on the roof of the baths. The Sultan passed by. I hailed him. He looked well at me and then passed by, still looking at me." Such words might well give joy to that stoker. As for saying, "The king is indifferent to stokers," what sort of praise for the king is that, and what joy can it give a stoker?

*No matter what our ranging thought*
*Within its compass may be brought.*

Oh poet, what indeed will pass within the compass of your thought when you find that people feel independent of you and bored with your thoughts and run away? God's independence is certain, oh poet, but if you have a spiritual state worth anything at all, He will not be independent of you. God's closeness to you establishes the degree of your greatness.

Sheikh Fakhre Akhlati used to say, "First see, then converse. Everyone sees the Sultan, but it is the favorite who enjoys his conversation." This too is backwards. Moses enjoyed the speech of God. God's words filled him. It was only afterwards he sought to see. Moses' station was the station of speech; the station of Mohammad was the station of seeing. How can the Sheikh's statement be correct?

Someone said to Shams-i-Tabriz, "I have established the existence of God by a categorical proof." The following morning our Master, Shams, said, "Last night the angels came down and blessed that man, saying, 'Praise be to God, he has established the existence of our God! God give him long life! He has done no harm to the honor of the people of this world!'"

Oh poet, God exists. He needs no proof. If you do anything at all, establish yourself in some rank and station before Him. Otherwise, how can you share in His grace?

*Nothing exists that does not proclaim His praise.*

Interpreters of Islamic law and lawyers are clever, a hundred per cent competent in their own specialty. But between them and the spiritual world, a wall exists that preserves their empire of logic and proofs. If that wall disappeared for them, no one would consult them, and their work would disappear.

As my father once said, "The other world is like a sea, and this world is foam from that sea. God desired to keep this foam in order. Therefore, He set certain people with their backs to the sea so this foam would not fall into ruin."

A tent is being pitched for a king. It keeps people busy constructing his tent. One person says, "If I don't make the tent-ropes how will the tent stand up?" Another says, "If I don't make the pegs, where will they tie the ropes?" Still, everybody knows these people are servants of the king. If the weavers gave up weaving because they want to be viziers, the whole world would be naked and bare. So, they were given a joy for their craft. They are content with weaving. Therefore, people were created to keep the world of foam in order, and this world was created for the Saint.

God bestows contentment and happiness on everyone for the work that is theirs, so that even if their life lasted a hundred thousand years they would still find love for what they do. Every day the love for their craft grows, and subtle new skills are learned, which bring them infinite joy and pleasure.

*Nothing exists that does not proclaim His praise.*

There is one praise for the rope-maker, another for the carpenter who makes the tent-poles, another for the maker of the tent-pins, another for the weaver who weaves the cloth for the tent, another for the saints for whom the tent is made.

Now these seekers who come to us, wanting some time with us, if we say nothing, they are disgusted and hurt. Yet if we say something, it must be beneficial to their level of attainment. So we approach cautiously, and they leave, criticizing us, saying, "They are holding back what they know. They are hiding from us and running away."

How should the fire run away from the cook pot? It cannot. The truth is that when we see the vessel is weak, we draw back some distance to protect it. So, it is really the pot that runs away. Our running away is their running away. We are a mirror. If they move to run away, they see that in us. We run away for their sake. In a mirror people see themselves. If they see us as weary, that weariness is theirs and a reflection of their weakness. There is no room here for weariness. What use do we have for weariness?

In the baths, once, I showed great submission to Sheikh Salâh al-Din, and Sheikh Salâh al-Din showed great submission to me. Confronted by his submission, I protested. I thought to myself, "You are carrying submission too far. Submission is better by degrees: First you kiss the hand, then the foot. Little by little you come to a point where it does not stand out as a display, and in return they are moved by your sincerity. They are not chased away or forced into matching courtesy with courtesy, when you gradually show your affection."

We must act this same way with friends and enemies, doing things gradually. For instance, with an enemy, first, we offer them our advice little by little. If they do not listen, we show some force. If they do not heed that, then we drive them away.

The work of the world proceeds in this way. Don't you see the peace and friendliness of spring? In the beginning it shows us warmth gradually. Then it displays its graces more and more. Look at the trees, how stage by stage they advance. First a smile, then they show their trappings of leaves and fruit, like dervishes and Sufis offering their hearts, giving away all that they possess.

Men and women run away from every goal, whether worldly or spiritual, because they overestimate the initial task. The proper way is a bit at a time. It is the same if someone eats too much; they should diminish it daily by a small bit, gradually. In that way, before a year or two have passed, they will cut down what they eat by half, reducing it in such a way that their body does not notice. So it is with worship, withdrawing into solitude, attending to the service of God, and prayer. When a person enters upon the Way of God—at first, their prayers will be short. But after that, if they pray with their whole heart, their prayers will go on and on without end.

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## COMMENTARY:

In the first half of this discourse, Rumi is addressing a public group with visitors. He explains how different the path of love and personal inner experience is from intellectual approaches to spirituality.

Observing the independence of God is the path of the mind. There is no comparison between such meditations and being drawn by love away from the physical world to dive into the ocean of Life.

Ecstatic experiences fill those moved by Divine Love. This takes us far beyond words and thoughts—even far beyond the practices of non-duality and no-thought. The presence and nearness of God change us in ways that reveal to us the book of Life, seeing it with our own eyes.

*...this world was created for the Saint.*

Halfway through this discourse—when Rumi says, "Now these seekers who come to us, wanting some time with us..."—the newcomers have left, and he starts talking to his closest students.

He explains then that he could not reveal the full teaching to these visitors for their own sake, even though this is what they wanted and came to hear.

The spiritual path must be traversed a step at a time. You can't pour wisdom out like water, or give it to people all at once. They would never understand and it could harm them. It must be gained gradually.

The path opens up to us the way a friend or lover reveals their true self. They come to know and trust us, little by little. It is not a matter of knowledge; this is a personal relationship that is developing.

This is what Rumi was trying to say in a delicate manner to the visitors.

# Twenty-Two

RUMI SAYS TO IBN CHÂVISH: The root of the matter is that you should guard against this backbiting when talking about Sheikh Salâh al-Din. Perhaps this will remove these dark shadows and clouds that surround you.

How can you defend yourself? People have left their own country, their fathers and mothers, their households, kinsfolk, and families, and have journeyed from Hind to Sind until their boots were cut to shreds, in search of someone having the fragrance of the other world. How many men and women have died of sorrow, never succeeding nor encountering such a person! As for you, you know such a man here in your own house, and you turn your back on him. This is a tragedy of recklessness.

You used to tell me that Sheikh Salâh al-Din was the sheikh of sheikhs, a great and mighty man. "From the day I entered his service," you said to me, "I never heard him once mention your name except as Rumi, Our Master, Our Lord, Our Creator. I never heard him change this humble expression for a single day." It must be your ambitions that have blinded you now. Today you say that Salâh al-Din is nothing.

What wrong has Sheikh Salâh al-Din ever done you? Only, when seeing you fall into a pit of self-destruction, he said to you, "Beware of the pit." He said this out of compassion for you, above all others, but you reject that compassion. Now, you find yourself in the midst of his wrath, and having plunged into this wrath, how will you escape? That is why he says, "Do not dwell in my house of wrath and anger. Move into my house of grace and compassion. Do something in praise of me, and enter my house of love." He says this because then your heart will shed this darkness and fill with light.

He says this to you for your own sake, for your own good, but you charge his compassion to some ulterior motive. What ulterior motive should a man like that have towards you? Isn't it true that whenever you are filled to satisfaction with drink, or music, or the dance of the dervishes, during those times you are pleased with every enemy, forgiving them all? In that hour, unbeliever and believer become the same in your eyes. Now Sheikh Salâh al-Din is the very ocean of this spiritual joy. All the seas of satisfaction are within him. How could he hate anyone, or have plans against them? And especially, what designs would he have against such as locusts and frogs? How can he, who possesses such empire and grandeur, be compared with such miserable creatures?

Is it not said that the Water of Life must be found in darkness? This darkness surrounds the saints, in whose being we find that Eternal Spring. The Water of Life is hidden in their darkness. If you turn from darkness and run away from it, how can the Water of Life ever reach you?

Don't you think if you wanted to learn sodomy from sodomites, or harlotry from harlots, you could never learn anything without putting up with a thousand disagreeable things, beatings and the thwarting of your desires? This is the only way you could attain your goal. Then how do you expect to attain the eternal and everlasting source of life, which is the station of the prophets and saints, without anything disagreeable or without any sacrifice? How could this ever happen?

What the Sheikh prescribes for you is the same as what Sheikhs of old prescribed: that you give up your wealth and position. Indeed, they used to tell a disciple, "Leave your wife, that we may take her," and the disciples put up with that. As for you, when he counsels you a simple thing, how is it that you run away?

Do you not see how people are overcome by blindness and ignorance when they fall in love, how they will fawn and grovel and sacrifice all their wealth, seeking somehow to win the one they want with every effort. Night and day they think of nothing else, never wearying of their pursuit, yet tiring of everything else. Then, is the love for the Sheikh and the love for God less than this?

Yet, at the smallest word of advice and discipline you object and desert the Sheikh. Hence it is known that you are no lover or seeker. Were you a true lover and seeker, you would put up with many times what we have described. To your heart, dung would become honey and sugar.

## COMMENTARY

Salâh al-Din, who we first hear about at the end of the last discourse, is Rumi's closest follower at the time of these two discourses. About ten years after Shams-i-Tabriz disappeared without a trace, Rumi declares that Salâh al-Din is the new light of the world and tells his students to treat Salâh al-Din as they would treat Rumi, himself. He often sends students to study under Salâh al-Din, and asks Salâh to give talks on his behalf. Rumi even instructs his son, Sultan Valad (also known as Baha al-din), to look to Salâh as his teacher.

Rumi is following here exactly what Shams did when he first met Rumi: He declared Rumi to be the light of the world and the one that he had long been looking for. Rumi became his chief disciple.

From this discourse we can see that Salâh al-Din could be harsh and demanding at times, in order to help students break through the hold of their ego. He was just as hard on Sultan Valad, asking him to give up public speaking and to turn his sermons and speeches over to Salâh. Rumi's son would later write that as difficult as it was, this practice of complete submission deepened his spiritual attainment. Sultan Valad would go on to marry Salâh al-Din's daughter, Fâteme Khâtun, who also was a student of Rumi's, and who Rumi had long praised as one of the most spiritually inclined of the women who came to him as disciples.[10]

Rumi says in this discourse that the Eternal Spring can only be found in the darkness of the saints: This is one of the least understood aspects of the spiritual path. It is as if a cloud rises up and stands in our way. It confronts us and forces us to make a choice: Will we run from this shadow of fears? Or is our desire for Truth strong enough that we will risk crossing the darkness of criticisms that encircle every spiritual teacher?

Why must it be like this? Shouldn't true Masters be recognizable to everyone? Why are there always suspicions and dark stories surrounding them? Aren't real saints free from these human failings?

These are not the right questions, however. What we should be asking is: When has there ever been a significant change in our life that has not come with worries, doubts, and concerns? The more our world is rocked, the greater our uncertainties.

It is the mind itself, then, that is afraid of change, especially anything that challenges who we think we are. This is a sign that we are close to something real and something important.

The question is: Will we flee from these clouds that rise up out of our own depths, or will we face them to learn what treasures they conceal? Anything that shakes our foundation can teach us. Those who are stopped by the warnings of darkness never venture far enough away from their house to find the Eternal Spring.

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[10] *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*, by Franklin D. Lewis, Oneworld Publications, London, 2003 pages 205–212

# Twenty-Three

RUMI SAYS: I would like to go to Tuqat, for that region is warm. Although Antalya is warm and many people there come from Rum, only a few of them understand our language. However, I was speaking there one day when a party of unbelievers was present. In the middle of my talk they began to weep with emotion and show signs of ecstasy.

Someone asks: "What can they understand? What do they know? Only one Muslim in a thousand understands this kind of talk. What could an unbeliever understand that would cause them to weep?"

Rumi answers: It isn't necessary for them to understand the inner meaning of what we say. The vessel of this meaning is the words themselves, and this they recognize. After all, everyone knows about the Oneness of God, Creator and Provider, the source of all life, where all things return. When anyone hears these words, which are a description and expression of God, a universal emotion and inner feeling stirs them, since out of these words comes a scent of their Beloved and their Quest.

The ways may vary, but the goal is one. Don't you see that there are many roads to the Kaaba? For some the road is from Rum, for some from Syria, others come from Persia or China or by sea from India and Yemen. So if you consider the roads, they are beyond counting, with infinite differences. But when you consider the goal they are all in accord with one desire.

The hearts of all are upon the sacred Kaaba. The hearts are one in their longing and love for the Kaaba, and in that there is no room for separation. That love is neither belief nor non-belief, for it has nothing to do with the various roads. Once we arrive, this argument and war and those differences in the roads—this woman saying to that man, "You are false, you are an infidel," and that man saying the same about her—once we arrive at the Kaaba, we realize that such fighting is over the roads only, and that the goal of all is the same.

For instance, a bowl's spirit is in love with its maker and is a slave to the hands that fashioned it. Yet some see this bowl and say it should be placed just as it is on the table. Some say the inside of it should be washed first, some say the outside of it must be cleaned. Some say all of it, some say it must never be washed at all. The diversity of opinion comes from the bowl's many uses, but as to the fact that the bowl certainly had a creator who fashioned it, and that it didn't come into existence of itself, on this all agree.

Now, men and women in their inmost hearts love God, seek It, pray to It and in all things put their hope in It, recognizing none but God as the central reality ordering their affairs. This is neither belief nor non-belief. Within the heart it has no name. But when the water of innate truth flows out of the heart towards the sluice of the tongue and takes form, it acquires shape and expression. There it is given the name of infidelity or faith, good or evil. It is the same with plants growing out of the earth. At first they have no form at all. When they make their appearance in this world their shoots all look fine, delicate and white. But as they grow further they take on different shapes and colors. Then we can call them by name.

When believers and infidels sit together and say nothing, they are one and the same. There is no conflict of belief; the heart is a free world. Beliefs are subtle things and cannot be judged. People can judge by outward expression only. God is the fashioner of our secret hearts. When God reveals your own beliefs to you, not a hundred thousand efforts can hide them again. As for the saying that God needs no instrument, do you not see how It bares those ideas and beliefs in you without any instruments, without any pen, without any pigment?

Beliefs are like birds of the air and wild deer. Until you catch them, it is not allowable by law to sell them. It is not in your power to sell a bird on the wing, for how could you deliver it? Since it is not in your power, it is not yours to sell.

Beliefs then, so long as they are in the heart, are without name and token—they cannot be judged. Would any judge say, "In your heart you made this oath, you had this idea," or "Come, swear that in your heart you did not think this?" No judge would say this, because no one can judge the inner heart. Beliefs are birds of the air. Yet once they have been expressed, then immediately they can be judged as true or false, good or evil.

There is a world of bodies, a world of ideas, a world of fantasies, a world of possibilities. God is beyond all worlds, neither within them, nor without. Consider then how God fashions our beliefs, forming them without material means, without pen or instrument. As for this fancy or that idea, if you were to tear open the breast and search particle by particle you would never find that thought. Not in the blood, not in the vein, not above, not below. Being immaterial and beyond time and space, you would not find it outside the breast, either.

*If from behind the curtain*
*The Holy Spirit appeared,*
*Its flesh would be*
*Humanity's wisdom and soul.*

Since God's mark is so subtle as to be without trace, consider how subtle and without trace is God, Itself, the fashioner of all! Just as the physical body is gross in relation to the inner meaning of a person, so this subtle and invisible meaning is a gross body and form next to God's subtlety.

All Muslims say, "We will enter the Holy Mosque." Some Muslims say, "If God wills, we will enter." Those who use the expression "if God wills" are the true lovers of God. For the lover does not think that they're in charge of things and a free agent. They recognize that the Beloved is in charge. Hence they say, "If this Beloved wills, I will enter."

Now the literalists take the Holy Mosque to be the Kaaba in Mecca. However, lovers and the elect of God take the Holy Mosque to mean union with God. So they say, "If God wills, we will attain God and be honored by the sight of God."

For God to say, "If God wills," is very rare. It is the tale of a stranger, and only a stranger can understand such a tale. Yet God has certain servants who are so well loved that It seeks them out, showering them with blessings, and carrying out all the actions of a lover. Just as the lover would say, "If God wills, I will enter," so God says on behalf of that saint, "If God wills."

If I were to try explaining this subtlety, even the saints who have attained God would lose the thread of the discourse. How then is it possible to speak of such mysteries and mystic states to mortal men and women? "The pen wrote this far, and then it broke!" If someone can't see the camel on top of their own house, how can they see the thread of one hair in the mouth of that camel?

To resume: Those lovers who say, "If God wills," such people are absorbed in God. There is no room for anything else. Otherness has no room to exist. For until a person has surrendered their image of a separate existence, the Holy Mosque cannot be found. Once emerged in God, there is no place for strangers or the remembrance of any but God. "There is none dwelling in the house but God."

### *"The vision He entrusted to His Messenger. . . ."*

This vision is the dream of lovers and true people of God, but the true meaning is only revealed in the other world. When you see in a dream that you are riding on a horse, this means you will attain your goal; yet what connection does the horse have with a goal? If you dream that you have been given coins of good currency, the meaning is that you will hear true and good words from a wise person; but how does a coin resemble a word? If you dream that you have been hanged before a crowd, you will become the chief of a people; but how do gallows resemble leadership? In the same way, the affairs of this world are a dream. "This world is the dream of a sleeper," and its meaning is seen quite differently in the other world. There it is truly judged by the Divine Interpreter, for to It all things are revealed.

Like a gardener who enters an orchard and looks at the trees, without even looking at the fruit on the branches, and recognizes this tree to be a date, that one a fig, that a pomegranate, a pear, or an apple. The true people of God know the science of trees, therefore they need not wait for the resurrection to see the interpretation of life. Such a person sees beforehand what will be, just as the gardener knows what fruit each branch will surely yield.

All things in this world—wealth, mate, and clothing—are desired for something other than themselves. Don't you see that even with a hundred thousand gold coins, if you were hungry, and you could find no food, you could not feed yourself on gold? A mate is for the sake of children, companionship, and to satisfy passion. Clothes are to ward off the cold. In this way, all things are desired for some other thing, each desire leading to the next, all ending in the desire for God. God is desired for Its own sake, not for anything else. Being beyond all, greater than all, nobler and subtler than all, can God be desired for something less? "So, It is the goal." Within God is the completion of all things, beyond It there is no transcending.

The human mind churns with doubts and difficulties. The mind can never be rid of these except when it is truly in love—then all its doubts and difficulties vanish. "Your love renders you blind and deaf."

For example, when Iblis would not bow down before Adam and opposed God's command, Iblis said, "My essence is spirit, his essence is clay. Why should the higher bow down before the lower?" So God banished Iblis for opposing and contending with Divine Law. Then Iblis argued, "Alas, O Lord! You made all things. This was Your temptation, and now You are cursing me and banishing me."

Yet when Adam sinned, God expelled him from Paradise, but Adam said nothing back. Then God said to Adam, "O Adam, I have held you responsible and punished you for the sin you committed, why did you not argue with Me? After all, you had a perfect case. You could have said, 'All things proceed from You and are made by You. Whatever You desire in the world comes to pass, and whatever You desire not will never come to pass.' You had a clear and valid case, why did you not argue it?" Adam answered, "I knew that well, Lord, but I did not forget courtesy in Your presence. Because of my love for You I could say nothing." Thus Adam's love stayed firm and was not swayed.

This sacred Law of Love is a watering place, a fountainhead. It is just like the court of a king where many study the king's laws, his commandments and prohibitions, his government—equal justice for nobles and commoners—etc. The edicts of the king are without end, and on them the stability of the country rests. But the status of dervishes and Sufis is one of love for the king. Out of their love springs conversation with the king and knowing his mind and heart. What is knowledge of the king's laws compared with knowing the ruler himself, his mind and heart? There is a vast difference.

The Sufis and their various teachings are like a school with many scholars. The headmaster pays each scholar according to their qualifications, giving to one ten, the next twenty, another thirty. We too dispense our words according to everyone's degree and qualification. "Speaking to each according to the degree of their understanding."

## COMMENTARY

In this last paragraph, Rumi describes a great insight into how spiritual teachings enter this world: It is like a school with many teachers. Some receive more than others of the inner truth from the headmaster, because of their capacity for understanding. These teachers then give out to their students according to their degree and level of awareness.

Thus, spiritual teachings flow out like a river through the sluice of tongues and hearts of those who are lovers of God. Still, it can only pour out to fulfill a need. No more is given than there is receptiveness for. There must be a thirst that calls forth the water, and there must also be a capability to accept it.

This need exists within us all, but for many it is not recognized. The meaning of God exists at such a deep level within Soul that it is rarely awakened or understood. However, even people who do not understand this inner desire are still stirred when they come to the banks of a mighty river. They might not know why the crash of a waterfall captivates them, but it still speaks to them and reminds them of something within themselves. Even if they could not understand the depths of Rumi's words, they were still moved by him and what he said.

Therefore, the words that are used and the methods chosen to teach are not the Truth. The whole of Reality is deeper and broader than thoughts and ideas. It has no form. It is like water, with no shape itself, that changes to fit the needs. Rocks and stones are what cause a stream to babble, and it is the capacity of the teacher and students that give a teaching its character and appearance.

*The ways may vary, but the goal is one.*

People fight over who knows Truth and who does not, but once they arrive at the formless heart of their inner longing, they realize that all this fighting was over words. All these teachings are just holders of something without form. If you follow the life in them back to their source you end up at God.

Those who know this secret drink at the fountainhead: How could they be satisfied with anything else? They care only about the heart of the heart of the heart.

Therefore, within every teaching can be found those who are the Swans, who see beyond outward appearances. They are the true carriers of Truth. Even rarer are those who move God to the point where He watches over them and pours out His love for them. Where they used to follow Spirit, now Spirit seems to follow them, whatever they do. Where they once gave all their heart and Soul to learn from Truth, it is now as if they shine so brightly with the flame of Life that what they say becomes Truth. How can such a miracle be understood by the minds of men and women? It is only within God that we can find the explanation for this mystery.

# Twenty-Four

PEOPLE BUILD THESE SACRED MONUMENTS for a particular reason: either to display their generosity for the sake of fame, or to gain a reward in heaven. God should be the true object in honoring the saints, their tombs and graves. Saints do not need to be honored; they are an honor to themselves.

If a lamp desires to be placed up high, it wants this for the sake of others, not for its own sake. What does a lamp care whether it is high or low? It is still a lamp shedding light. But the lamp wants its light to reach others. The sun, if it were not in the height of the heavens would still be the same sun, only the world would fall into darkness. So the sun attains its height not for its own sake, but for the love of others. The saints, too, have gone beyond such things as above and below and the worship of people.

Look at yourself when you are granted a fragment of ecstasy and a flash of grace from the other world. In that moment you see no above or below, mastership or discipleship, or even yourself, which is nearer to you than all else. These things do not enter your mind. So how can the saints, who are the windows and doorways for that light and inspiration, be concerned about above and below. Their heart is with

God, and God is independent of below and above. This higher and lower belongs to us who have heads and feet.

Mohammad said, “Do not hold me above Jonah, son of Matthew, just because his ascension was in the belly of a whale while my ascension was in heaven upon the Throne.” He meant, “God is neither above nor below. His presence is the same, whether in heaven or in the belly of the whale.”

There are many who have aims of their own, while God has another goal. God desired the religion of Mohammad to be honored, to be spread abroad and to abide down through time. Consider how many volumes have been written about the Koran. Yet the aim of those writers was to display their own virtuosity.

Zamakhshari filled his Kashshaf with numerous details of grammar, lexicography, and rhetoric to display his own learning—but it also fulfilled God’s purpose, namely the exaltation of the religion of Mohammad. So, all people do God’s work, whether they know it or not. A man and woman satisfy their lust with each other for the sake of their own enjoyment, but the result is the birth of a child. In the same way everyone works for his or her own pleasure and enjoyment, and this is the means of maintaining the order of the world. In reality they are serving God, although that is not their intent.

In the same way, people carve miniature mosques at great expense to beautify their doors and walls. Mecca is the true aim and object of honor, and its honoring is all the greater since that was not their true intention.

The greatness of the saints means nothing in this world. By Allah, yes, they have an elevation and magnitude, but it is beyond space and time. Suppose, for instance, you placed a silver dirham on the roof, and a gold piece under it. Is not the gold still superior in all circumstances? Similarly, the chaff is above the sieve and the corn falls under it; but how can the chaff be “above” the corn? The superiority of the corn does not come from its position in this world, but from its place in that world of realities.

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## COMMENTARY

All of the monuments, statues, and temples built in honor of spiritual leaders and saints around the globe were created for the sake of the builders to gain their own recognition here or to gain rewards in the next world. Religious organizations and individuals craft such works of art to promote their own causes. This should not be confused with the purpose of the spiritual travelers.

Public praise and fame mean nothing to them. It does not add to their stature, and it reflects only worldly popularity, not their real spiritual teaching.

The true value of spiritual unfoldment is not understood in this world and never will be, because it is only recognized within Soul. Who cares about better or worse, good or bad, higher or lower, when all of Life becomes imbued with wholeness and completeness?

How could pinning a star on their chest make them a brighter light for the world or more valuable? There is only one benefit to holding their name up high: If it can help others see the Light that flowed through them.

True spiritual teachers don't work from a personal desire to teach. If something comes through them, they know it is not from them or for them. It comes from the depths of God for the sake of Soul. Whether the world recognizes their teaching or not doesn't matter to them, because they know that true spiritual realization means little to this world, and will never be valued here.

You can make a good living selling religious teachings, but Truth itself is worth nil, because it cannot be sold. Soul must earn it individually, through its own search and relationship with Truth. This is why fame and wealth mean nothing to lovers who dwell in the presence of God.

Preserving the images and names of spiritual teachers is not important. If we want to do anything, we should seek to spread the Light that they spread. Our purpose should not be furthering their name, but working for the whole of Life, Itself.

# Twenty-Five

SOMEONE ENTERS. Rumi nods to him and says: He is beloved and humble, like a branch loaded with fruit—the fruit weighs it down. A branch with no fruit raises its head up high, like the white poplar, but when that fruit exceeds all bounds, they put props under the branch so it will not come down altogether.

Mohammad was extremely humble. All the fruits of this world and the next were gathered on his branch, so of course he was humbler than others. He said, "No one ever preceded the Messenger of God in making a greeting." No one could precede the Messenger in offering greetings because he outstripped all others in humility and always made his greetings first. Even if others said their greeting before him, still his humility came before they even spoke. Everyone learned humble greetings from him and hears his greeting within before saying a word.

Everything that ancient or modern people possess is a shadow of the Messenger of God. Though shadows of people might cross the threshold before them, still they come first. True, their shadows may appear to be in front, but their shadows come from them, and therefore always follow.

Our grace and humility are not made from this present moment; these atoms existed in that primeval time, from those particles and parts of the first Messenger of God. In this hour they become visible again, but this splendor and brightness is ancient. Its original light was altogether purer and brighter and more humble.

Some people see the beginnings of things, and some look to the end. Those who look to the end goal are great and mighty; for although their eyes are fixed on this moment, still they look into the world beyond. But those who see the beginning are greater. They say, "Why look to the end? If wheat is sown in the beginning, barley will not grow. If oats are planted, you cannot reap corn." So their gaze is fixed upon the beginning.

There are others even greater yet, who look at neither the beginnings nor the endings—the start and finish do not enter their minds. They are absorbed in God. However, those who are absorbed in worldly things do not see the beginning or end either, but in their case this is out of extreme carelessness—they are the fodder of fools.

So, we can see that Mohammed was the foundation:

*"But for you, I would not have created the heavens."*

All that exists of honor and humility, authority and high degree—all are inheritances from him. These attributes are his shadow, for they all became manifest from him.

Whatever this hand does it does as the shadow of Spirit, for Spirit's shadow directs it. In truth, Spirit has no shadow, yet it has a shadow without a shadow, just as 'meaning' has form without form. If the shadow of Spirit were not over us, all of our body would wither away. Our hands would no longer grasp, our feet would not know how to walk, our eyes and ears would be lost in confusion. Therefore, in reality all those actions proceed from Spirit. The body is the instrument of Spirit's tongue.

In the same way, there is a great person, the caliph of their time. They are like the Universal Spirit, and the spirits of humankind are their body. Whatever the people of this world do is their shadow. If the actions of some are in error, it is because the Universal Spirit lifted its shadow from their heads. When someone goes mad and acts crazy, everyone knows that reason has left them and no longer casts its shadow over them. They are far away from the shadow and shelter of Spirit.

Spirit is kin to the angel. Although angels have definite form, while Spirit does not, both possess the same nature and act exactly the same. We should not be fooled by the form when they are identical in every way. If you dissolved an angel's form, nothing would remain but Spirit. Therefore, angels are the embodiment of Spirit.

A bird can be molded of wax complete with feathers and wings, but it is still wax. If you melt it, don't you see that its head and feet, feathers and wings all return to wax? Nothing else remains. From this we know that it is wax embodied into a certain shape, but wax none-the-less.

Similarly, ice is nothing but water. When you melt it, only its form dissolves.

The human being was created like this: They took the feathers of an angel and tied them to the tail of an ass, in hopes that the ass—from the radiance and companionship of the angel—might become an angel, too. What is so wonderful if this ass became a human? God is able to do all things.

*Wisdom gave Jesus wings,*
*To Heaven he flew, and higher.*
*If his donkey had half a wing,*
*Would it have clung so long to the mire?*

When a child is first born, it is worse than an ass, sticking its hands in filth and then into its mouth to lick. The mother must slap the baby to stop it. The ass at least has some sort of discrimination; when it urinates, it opens its legs so the urine will not trickle on them. Yet the child, who is worse than an ass, God raises into a man or woman. If God should turn the ass into a human, what is so astounding in that? With God, nothing is cause for astonishment.

At the resurrection, all parts of a person will speak. The philosophers interpret this allegorically. They say: When the hand speaks, perhaps some sign, like a scratch or abscess, will show on its skin. Then you can say, in a sense, that the hand speaks since it gives information, "I ate something causing inflammation, and so I became like this." Or the hand is wounded and becomes black. These signs tell a story, saying "A knife struck me," or "I rubbed myself against a black pot." So much for the philosophers!

The Sufi theologians say: God forbid! No indeed! The hands and feet will speak just as the tongue speaks. On the day of resurrection a person will deny their past saying, "I did not steal." But their hand will answer, "Yes you stole, since I took." They will then turn to their hand, saying, "You've never spoken before, how can you speak now?" The hand will answer, "God gave us speech, just as It gives all things speech. It gives speech to the door and wall, the stone and clod. What is so astonishing about that?"

You speak with your tongue, yet it is merely a piece of flesh. Your hand is also a piece of flesh. Is your tongue endowed with reason? Yet when God commanded it to speak, it spoke.

Words come according to the attainment of the listener. Speech is like water that flows from a reservoir. How can the water know where they will send it—into the cucumber patch, the onion bed, or the rose garden? But I know this: when water comes in torrents, there the lands are thirsty and extensive. But if only a little trickle flows, that ground is small—a little orchard, or a tiny courtyard. The Prophet said, "God inspires wisdom in the tongue of the teacher according to the aspirations of the student." I am a cobbler. The leather is plentiful, but I cut and stitch according to the size of the foot.

*I am your mirror.*
*I am your shadow and measure;*
*Just like your stature,*
*That much my treasure.*

A worm lives under the earth in darkness. It has no eyes or ears because where it lives it doesn't need them. Since there is no need, why give eyes and ears to worms? God has no scarcity of eyes and ears and It is not miserly, but It gives according to the need. Anything else becomes a burden. God's wisdom and grace remove burdens; how could It do otherwise? For instance, if you gave tailors the tools of a carpenter—ax, saw, and a file—you would burden them, since they cannot use such instruments to make clothes. So God gives according to need and no more.

Just as those worms thrive in darkness under the earth, there are people who are content and satisfied to live in the darkness of this world, having no need for the heavenly world, and no yearning for Vision. Of what use to them is the eye of clairvoyance or the ear of understanding? Their work in this world needs only the eyes they have. Since they have no desire for the other side, why give them clairvoyance? It would be useless to them.

*Do not think that saints no longer travel this road.*
*Perfect in all life's ways, faultless people of God.*
*Because you can't see their secrets through your eyes,*
*You fancy, in your vain conceit, no others have gained that prize.*

This world continues through heedlessness. If it were not for heedlessness, this world would not last. Yearning for God, contemplation of the next world, intoxication, and ecstasy—these are builders of the inner realm. If these true desires revealed themselves to everyone, there would be a worldwide exodus. None would remain. Yet God wants both worlds to exist, so It appointed two sheriffs—one heedlessness, the other heedfulness—so that both houses could thrive.

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi's discourses weave one idea to the next. Can you follow the subtle thread?

He first comments on the humility of someone entering the room. It is someone he knows. He has watched this person grow as one of his own students. He sees the man's bowed head as he enters the room as a sign of spiritual fruit pulling down the branch of a tree. Rumi says this in appreciation and thanks.

However, this is no place for vanity, as Rumi takes us to the source of our grace and shows us that all we gain comes from the Messengers of God. The subtleties of Spirit we are learning now, they first learned. The discoveries filling our hearts are but reflections of the wonders that once filled the hearts of the Men and Women of God, who walked the path before us.

In other words, humility comes from recognition, appreciation, and thanks. This is what bears fruit. Seeing how our lives fall under the shadow of Spirit awakens us to the presence of Spirit. This is not a great spiritual reality that only existed in past ages. It is here in this moment, now.

Yet, how often do we see this? Are we so focused on our goals that we forget that nothing grows in our heart but the seeds we cultivate? If we nurture wheat, why expect barley? If we plant oats, why are we surprised to find no corn?

Even barley and oats therefore speak to us and teach us, as all things speak to those who hear the voice of Spirit.

Appreciation and gratitude turn our faces to the source, and this brings about the awakening of our spiritual inheritance.

In other words, Rumi's subtle threads are ancient teachings, woven down through time into the lives of those who find the humility of thankfulness, today.

# Twenty-Six

RUMI SAYS: If I appear lacking in gratitude and appreciation for the kindness and support you show me, both directly and indirectly, it is not out of arrogance or indifference, nor is it because I don't know the importance of returning your favor and love. But I am aware from the purity of your efforts that you do these things sincerely for the sake of God, so I leave it to God to thank you. If I concerned myself with the need for thanking you, granting you verbal honor and praising you, it would be as if some part of the treasure that God has set aside for you was already given, some part of your reward had already been paid.

Humble attitudes towards you, offering thanks and applause for you—these are worldly pleasures. But when you have gone to worldly pains such as the sacrifice of wealth and position, how can worldly pleasure be a satisfactory return? Therefore, I do not offer thanks since that reward should come entirely from God.

No one can eat wealth. Wealth is sought for what it brings, not what it is. With wealth people purchase horses, servant-girls, and slaves. Then they display these riches so that others will praise and applaud them. Therefore, it is the world itself that is held up so high, and it is this world that is praised and applauded.

Sheik Nassaj of Bukhara was an honored, spiritual man. Learned and great people came to visit him and knelt at his feet. The Sheik was unlettered, but they loved to hear him expounding on the Koran and Traditions of the Prophet. He would say, "I do not know Arabic. Translate a verse from the Koran so I can tell you its meaning." They would translate the verse. Then he would begin to explain and reveal the truth in it. He would say, "The Prophet was in such and such a situation when he uttered this verse. The circumstances took place like this. . . ." And he would describe in detail the spiritual level of that situation, the ways leading up to it, and how the Prophet gained that state.

One day a descendant of Ali was praising a certain judge while standing next to the judge, saying, "There is no judge like this man anywhere in the world. He does not take bribes. He dispenses justice amongst others without partiality or favor, purely and sincerely for the sake of God." When Sheik Nassaj heard this he replied, "To say that he doesn't take bribes is certainly a lie. You, an honored descendant of Ali, praise and applaud him to his face, saying that he does not take bribes. Isn't that a bribe? What could be a better bribe than that?"

Sheik Tirmidhi once said, "Sayed Burhan al-Din expounds truths so well because he has studied the books, secret writings, and treatises of the masters." A Sufi answered, "But you study them as well. Why don't you speak like he does?" Tirmidhi replied, "Well, Burhan al-Din has also made great spiritual efforts and accomplishments." The Sufi said, "Why didn't you say that in the first place? You only know how to repeat what you have read; that is the difference. But we are now speaking of something greater than books—you, too, can speak of that!"

Few care about the other world at all. They have fixed their hearts upon this world entirely. Some seek these teachings to eat the bread of God, some only to inspect the bread. They want to learn these words just to sell them. These words are like a beautiful bride: If a pretty maiden is bought only to be sold again, how can she love her buyer or fix her heart upon him? Since the pleasure of that merchant comes only in selling, he is as good as impotent. He buys the girl to sell her, not having the manhood and virility to want her for himself.

If a fine Indian sword falls into the hands of an effeminate man, he will sell it. If a mighty Pehlevi bow falls into his hands, he will sell that as well, since he does not have the strength of arm to draw the bow. He desires that bow for the value of the string; he has no capacity for the string, itself. He is in love merely with what it will bring. When such a man sells the bow, he trades it for rouge and indigo. What else should he do? Marvelous! What could he buy better than that?

These words mean nothing except to the initiated! Beware! Do not say, "I have understood." The more you understand and grasp these words, the farther you will be from understanding them. Their meaning comes in not understanding. All your troubles, misfortunes, and disappointments arise from such understanding. This understanding is a chain for you. You must escape it to gain anything at all.

You say, "I filled my sheepskin in the sea, but the sea was too great to be contained in my sheepskin." That is absurd. If you say, "My sheepskin was lost in the sea," that is excellent! That is the root of the matter. Reason is fine and useful until it brings you to the door of the King. Once you have reached His door, give up reason, for in that hour reason is a sheer loss to you, a highway robber. When you have reached the King, surrender yourself to Him. You have no use, then, for the how and wherefore.

For instance, you buy uncut cloth to make a tunic or a cloak. Reason brings you to a tailor. Until that moment reason is fine, for it brings the cloth to the tailor. In that very moment reason must be forgotten. Now you must abandon yourself wholly to the direction of the tailor. In the same way, reason is fine when you are sick because it brings you to the physician. After that, reason is of no use, since you must surrender yourself to the doctor's advice.

Your companions hear your secret cries of love for God. When they come to you, you will know which of them has that true substance—the responsiveness of Soul. In a train of camels, the camel in rut is easily spotted by its eyes, its manner of walking, and its breath.

*"Their mark is on their faces, the trace of prostration."*

Although it is the roots of a tree that drink, you can see the results of that drinking through its branches, leaves, and fruit. The tree that does not drink withers—how can this stay concealed?

You will hear their loud shouts because they understand paragraphs from a single word you speak, and from a single letter they recognize all the overtones. They are like someone who studied the Koran: As soon as they hear the first word of commentary from the Koran, they understand all the root ideas and questions, since they know its source. They will offer observations on that single word as if to say, "Within the depths of this subject I know many things and see many things, for I have worked and studied, turning night into day. I have found the treasures."

*"Did We not expand your breast out of love for you?"*

The expansion of the breast is infinite. Once that expansive truth has been tasted, we understand much from even one hint. But beginners will only understand from a word the meaning of that one word. What inner knowledge and ecstasy can they possess?

Words are spoken according to the capacity of the listeners. If beginners do not know how to draw wisdom out, how can it come forth? Once they breathe in, then wisdom will fill their hearts. But they say, "For heaven's sake, why aren't the words spoken?" The answer is, "For heaven's sake, why don't you draw this wisdom in?" Whoever withholds the power to listen also withholds from the speaker the impulse to speak.

In the time of the Prophet, a certain unbeliever had a Muslim slave who was a man of true substance. One morning the unbeliever ordered his slave, "Fetch basins. I am going to the baths." On the way they passed by the Prophet praying in the mosque with his companions. The slave said, "Master, for God's good sake take this bowl for a moment, so that I can make a few genuflections, then I will attend to you."

Entering the mosque, he prayed. The Prophet came out with his companions. The slave remained alone in the mosque. His master waited for him till mid-morning, then he shouted, "Come out, slave!" The slave answered, "They won't let me go, as the work has gone beyond bounds." The master put his head inside the mosque to see who it was that wouldn't let the slave go. Except for a shoe and a shadow he saw no one. Nobody stirred. He said, "Well, who is it that won't let you come out?" The slave replied, "The same One who will not allow you to come in, the very same One whom you cannot see."

People always want to see things that they've never seen before. Night and day they search for new experiences. They are slaves to anything they have never enjoyed before, but are bored and run away from what they've already heard and understood. For this reason philosophers reject the Vision of God, saying, "If you can become bored with what you see, this cannot be truth." The Sufi theologians say, "This could occur only if God was single-colored. But in truth He comes forth in a hundred colors, every instant."

*"Every day He is upon a task."*

If God should reveal Himself a hundred thousand times, not one moment would resemble another. Every instant you see God's display, and yet not even one act resembles another. In times of happiness you see one display, in times of weeping you find another. During moments of fear you see one face, during hope another. Since God's creations and acts vary infinitely, one not like another, you can be sure the display of His Essence also varies endlessly. You, too, being a single spark of God's flame, change a thousand times every instant and never stay the same.

There are certain seekers of God who proceed from the Koran to God. Others, more elect, come from God, find the Koran here, and know that God has sent it down.

*"We have seen the Remembrance, and We will watch over it."*

Commentators say that this quote refers to the Koran, but it also means, "We have seen in you a substance, a seeking, a yearning. We will watch over that, not letting it go to waste, but will bring it to its rightful place."

Once you say "God", then stand firm under all calamities that rain down upon you. A certain person came to the Prophet and said to him, "Truly, I love you." The Prophet said, "Take heed what you say." The person repeated, "Truly, I love you." Mohammad said, "Take heed what you say." They said, "Truly, I love you." Mohammad said, "Now stand firm, for with my own hand I will slay you. Woe upon you!"

Another person came to the Prophet and said, "I don't want this religion. By Allah, take it back. Ever since I entered your religion I haven't had peace for a single day. My wealth is gone, my spouse has left, my child cannot be found, my respect is destroyed, my strength is sapped, even my lust has disappeared." Mohammad answered, "What did you expect? Wherever our religion goes it does not return without uprooting that person and sweeping clean their house."

*"None but the purified shall touch God."*

So long as there remains in you a single trace of self-love, God will not show His face to you. You will not be worthy of His presence. You must become wholly indifferent to yourself and the world, so that Friend can show His face. So, whenever our religion lodges in a heart, it will not withdraw its hand until it brings that heart to God and severs from it all that is untrue.

The Prophet went on to say to that person, "You have no peace because it is sorrow's purpose to empty you of previous joys. So long as food fills your stomach, you are not given new food to eat. During elimination, we eat nothing. When we are empty and hungry, then we are given food. Be patient and grieve, for grieving is the emptying of yourself. After you are empty, then joy can enter—a joy with no sorrow, a rose without a thorn, a wine without crop sickness."

Why, night and day, do you search for quiet and rest? They cannot be found in this world. But not for one instant do you give up seeking these things. The comfort you find in this world is like a lightning flash that passes but never endures. And what kind of lightning is it? Lightning full of hail, full of rain and snow, full of suffering. For instance, someone sets out for Antalya. They go toward Caesarea hoping to reach Antalya, and never turn back even though it is impossible to reach Antalya by this route. But another who goes by the Antalyan road, though lame and feeble, still they will reach their goal, since that is where the Antalyan road ends.

No task in this world or the next is without suffering. Therefore, devote your suffering to the next world so it will not be wasted. You say, "O Mohammad take away this religion from me, for I can find no rest." How can our religion let anyone go before it brings them to the goal?

There was a certain teacher who, due to poverty, wore only a single garment of cotton in the middle of winter. By chance, torrents of rain brought down a bear out of the mountains, carrying the bear along, with its head hidden in the water. The children, seeing its back, cried, "Teacher, look! A fur coat has fallen into the water, and you are cold. Take it!"

The teacher in dire need and cold jumped in to catch the fur coat. The bear quickly plunged its claws into the teacher's back. Thus, the bear in the water caught the teacher.

"Teacher," the children shouted, "either grab the fur coat or let it go and come out!"

"I am letting the fur coat go," answered the teacher, "but the fur coat isn't letting me go. What should I do?"

How can God's love let you go? We should be thankful that God does not let us go. When a child is small it knows nothing but milk and its mother. Yet, God does not leave the child there, but leads it on to eat bread and to play, and in this manner draws it on to the stage of reason. So too in this world—which is in its infancy compared with that other world—God does not leave you here, but brings you on so you can realize that this is infancy and nothing at all. I am amazed at the people who must be dragged to Paradise in chains and fetters.

> *"Take them and fetter them, then roast them in Paradise,*
> *then roast them in Union, then roast them in Beauty, then*
> *roast them in Perfection."*

Fishermen do not drag out a fish all at once. Once the hook has entered the fish's throat they reel it in a little so it will lose strength. Then they let it out, and draw it in again, until it weakens. When the hook of Love falls into our throat, God draws us gradually so those bad attributes will leave us little by little.

"There is no God, but God"—that is what the common folk say. The elect believe "There is no Self, but Self." Someone sees in a dream that they are a ruler. They are seated on a throne with servants, chamberlains, and princes standing by. They say, "I am the ruler, and there is no ruler but me." They say this in their sleep. When they wake up and see no one in the house but themselves, they say, "I am, and there is no other than that I Am." To realize this, one must be fully awake.

Every religion denies every other. One group says, "We are the true ones. Revelation belongs to us. All others are false." All the others say exactly the same. So the two and seventy creeds are in agreement that all others are without revelation. They are all in accord that there is no revelation to any other religion, and that out of the lot of them there is but one true path. So, a believer must have discrimination and wisdom to know which one it is. Such discrimination and wisdom is true faith.

Someone says: "The religions that don't know are many, and those that know are few. If we are to occupy ourselves with distinguishing all of them, it will be a long business."

Rumi answers: Although there are many who do not know, when you know a few, you have known them all. In the same way when you know a single handful of corn, you know all the corn stacks in the world. If you have tasted sugar once, though halvah is made in a hundred different varieties, still in that halvah you know the sugar.

If these words seem repetitious to you, it is only because you have not yet learned the first lesson, so I must say it every day. There was once a student who was taught for three months, but never went beyond "A is for apple." The child's father came and said to the teacher, "I never fail to pay your fees. If I have ever failed a payment, please let me know, and I will pay more." The teacher answered, "The failure is not yours, but the child doesn't go beyond this point." The teacher called the student and said, "Say, A is for apple." The child said, "Is for apple," unable to say "A." The teacher said, "You see? Since the child has not passed the first point, how can I give any more?" The father said, "Praise belongs to God."

We do not say, “Praise belongs to God” after a meal because there was a shortage of bread. Bread and blessings are without limit, but our appetite leaves us and our guests are sated. That is why we say, “Praise belongs to God.”

The bread of revelation is very different from this worldly bread, because even with no appetite you can force yourself to eat as much worldly bread as you want. And since it is inanimate, you can drag it wherever you like. It does not have the spirit to withhold itself from those who are not worthy. But Divine bread is a living wisdom and a living blessing. As long as you desire nothing else, it comes towards you and becomes your food. But should your desire fail, you will not be able to eat it, even by force. It hides behind the veil and will not show you its face.

[Rumi was telling stories about miracles of the saints. He says:] For someone to fly from here to the Kaaba in an instant is not so wonderful. The same thing happens with dust storms: in a moment they reach everywhere and travel any place they wish. But a true miracle is this: that God should bring you from a lowly estate to a high estate, that you should travel from ignorance to reason, from the inanimate to life. Just as at first you were earth and mineral, God brought you to the vegetable world. Then you journeyed from the vegetable world to the animal world, from the animal world to the world of humanity.

These are the true miracles. Through these stations and forms you journeyed, never once thinking where you would end up, by which path you would be taken, or how you would be brought. Even so, you will be brought to a hundred other worlds. Do not doubt it; and if you are told such stories, believe them.

A bowl of poison was brought as a present to Umar. “Of what use is this?” he asked.

They said, “When it is not publicly advisable to kill someone openly, you can give them a little of this. Then they will die secretly. If it is an enemy who cannot be slain with the sword, with a little of this they can be killed clandestinely.”

“You have brought me a very good thing,” he said. “Give it to me to drink, for within me is a mighty enemy whom the sword cannot reach. I have no greater enemy in the world than he.”

"There is no need to drink it all up in one gulp," they told him. "Just one sip is enough. This bowl is sufficient for a hundred thousand people."

"My enemy, too, is not one person," said Umar. "He is a thousand strong, and has overthrown a hundred thousand."

He then seized the cup and drank it all in one draft. At once the assembled multitude all became believers, crying, "Your religion is true!"

"You have all become believers," said Umar, "and yet this infidel within me has not yet become a believer."

What Umar desired was not the faith of the common people. He had that faith and more—indeed, he had the faith of the veracious. He was seeking the faith of the Prophets in absolute certainty. That was what he hoped for.

The report of a lion spread abroad through all parts of the world. It was said this lion had a special quality: Anyone who approached him boldly, and rubbed their hands upon him lovingly, would not be harmed, but if they were afraid and timorous the lion would be enraged against them. Sometimes he even attacked, as if to say, "What is this bad opinion you have of me?"

A certain person, marveling at the rumor, traveled from far away to see the lion. For a year this person endured the rigors of the road, travelling from town to town. After finally arriving at the thicket and spying the lion from afar, this lion-seeker stood still and could advance no closer.

People said to this person, "You set forth on a long road out of love for this lion. For this creature you have struggled on for a year. Now that you have come so close, why do you stand still? Advance one more step!"

But none of them had the courage to take a further step. They all said, "The steps we took up to here were all easy. Yet this one step is beyond us."

What Umar desired was that step, to take one step in the presence of the lion towards the lion. That step is a great and rare matter, the concern of only the chosen and intimate of God. Yet this is the true step—the rest are mere footprints. Such faith comes only to prophets who have washed their hands of their own life.

A lover is a wonderful thing. We derive strength, life, and growth from even the thought of our beloved. Why is this surprising? Laila's spirit gave strength to Majnun and became his food. If her image had such power and influence over Majnun, then why should you marvel at the thought of God giving strength to Umar? That was not a mere thought. That was the very soul of all realities! It is just such a thought that maintains this world.

You say "reality" is what you can see and perceive with your senses, otherwise you call it "imagination." The opposite is true! This world is what is imagined. Out of reality springs a hundred worlds like this that will rot one day and disappear. Then a new world springs forth, even better than the last. Reality does not become old or new. These are but temporary expressions of what is Real.

An architect sees a building in their thoughts. They picture it to be so tall, so long, its floor angles this way; its courtyard is shaped like this. People do not call this "imagination." But when someone, who knows nothing about building, talks about such details, certainly that is different. As people say, "They are just imagining things."

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi is speaking about those who take that most important step toward the lion, in the presence of the lion. This is far beyond the faith of the voracious.

> *That step is a great and rare matter, the concern of only the chosen and intimate of God. Yet this is the true step—the rest are mere footprints.*

Do not think you understand this. The more you try to grasp these words, the farther you will be from their meaning. You must escape understanding to gain any of this at all.

How can this be? Who is capable of attainment without attaining? Thankfully, it is God's love that holds us and does not let us go. God's love draws us gradually, until we cannot do anything else but make that last step and risk all that we are.

There are those who hear your secret cries of love for God. When they come to you, they recognize that true substance—the responsiveness of Soul. Forget all else.

# Twenty-Seven

IT IS BETTER NOT TO QUESTION what Sufis say, since this obliges them to invent a lie.

If a materialist questions a Sufi, the Sufi must reply. But how can they answer truthfully to someone incapable of understanding Truth? The materialist's mouth and lips are not able to receive such a delicate morsel. So the Sufi must answer people according to their capacity and experience, namely by inventing an answer that sends them away.

Although everything the Sufi says is true and cannot be a lie, yet compared to the first thing they said, it is farther from the truth. If they are questioned, what good is there in answering with more truth?

Even still, the lie given by the Sufi is good for the materialist, and more than right.

A certain dervish had a disciple who used to beg for him. One day out of what they gained from their begging, the disciple brought some food to their master. The dervish ate the food. That night he had a wet dream.

"Where did you get that food?" he asked the disciple.

"A lovely girl gave it to me," the disciple answered.

"By Allah," said the dervish, "it is twenty years since I had a wet dream. This is the effect of her morsel."

This shows that Sufis must be careful. They should not eat crumbs from everyone. Dervishes become sensitive. Subtle things affect them and become visible on them, just as a little blackness shows on clean white gowns. However, as for a dark gown that has become black with grime for many years, if a thousand kinds of filth should trickle on it, it would make no difference.

So, the spiritual seeker should avoid eating food from those who act cruelly, who live on injustice or who are filled with lust. Their morsels will affect the Sufi and taint their thoughts, just as the dervish who had the wet dream.

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## COMMENTARY

Spiritual teachers, who teach others inwardly for the sake of Soul, give out what is appropriate to each person. No one statement is suitable for all. There is no other way to teach this Path.

It is best for seekers to listen with patience to what the teacher first says and try to absorb the depths of it. For those who cannot grasp the whole Truth, the teacher must invent half-truths. What else can they understand? Those myths are the closest to Truth that they can digest.

Seekers should take more care in what they consume and who they associate with. Even the mildest of worldly desires can affect them.

In other words, once you learn to live on Truth, nothing else will do. For those who live on lies, lies are the closest things to Truth they can understand.

# Twenty-Eight

THE LONG ENTREATING PRAYER SONG of seekers and travelers tells a story of lives occupied in labor and devotion with each effort assigned to its special time. It is as though an overseer of habit draws them to their specific task. For example, when first rising in the morning, they give themselves to contemplation and worship while the mind is quiet and clear. Thus, each performs the service that is suitable to them and comes within the scope of their noble Soul.

There are a hundred thousand ranks. The purer someone becomes, the higher up they are raised. This story of spiritual growth is a long one. Whoever tries to shorten it would shorten their own life and Soul, but for the grace of God. As for the prayer songs of those who have attained union with God, I must speak within the limits of understanding—for their love and the purity of their voices attract holy spirits, pure angels, and those visitors whom none know but God—the Silent Ones whose names are hidden from the world out of exceeding jealousy.

You are seated beside them now, but you do not see them. Neither do you hear their speech, their greetings, or laughter. What is so marvelous about this? When someone is sick, they see apparitions that others cannot see. Yet these spiritual beings are a thousand times subtler than those apparitions, for while the average person does not see or hear such visions until they are sick, they will not see these spiritual beings before they die. Such spiritual visitors know the refined states and majesty of the saints. They watch from earliest morn, while a thousand other angels and pure spirits wait upon the saints. For this reason the Silent Ones hesitate infinitely—not wanting to intervene in the midst of such a chorus, or disturb the ones they wish to honor.

Slaves stand by every morning at the door of the king's palace. Each comes to a fixed station, offers a predetermined service, and gives a certain level of devotion. Some serve from afar, and the king does not see them or notice them. All the slaves know which one amongst them has the honor of the king's presence. When the king leaves, the servants attend to that one from every gate, for there is no greater way to serve the king. That one has taken on the characteristics of the king and becomes the hearing and sight of the king for all the others.

Such a one has attained an extremely majestic station, ineffable, indeed. The majesty of it cannot be comprehended by spelling out M-a-j-e-s-t-y. If even a small trace of this majesty penetrated the world, the letter "M" would be unwritable, the sound "M" would be unpronounceable, nor could any hint or symbol remain. The whole city would be devastated by the hosts of Light.

*"Kings, when they enter a city, disorder it."*

A camel enters a house, and the house is devastated, but in that ruin there are a thousand treasures.

*Only in ruins may a treasure be found.*
*In thriving cities a hound is still a hound.*

If I have described at length the station of the seekers, how can I explain the states of those who have attained? They have no end—only seekers have an end. The end of all seekers is attainment. What could be the end for those who have attained union, a union with no separation? No ripe grape returns to an unripe grape. No mature fruit ever becomes raw again.

*Yes, it is unlawful to speak*
*Of these things to women and men.*
*But once Thy Name is said, O God,*
*These words pour out for them.*

By Allah, I will not make it long. I will make it short.

*I swallow the blood of suffering,*
*But You say that I've drunk wine.*
*You claim to give the gift of life,*
*Yet You've taken this soul of mine.*

Whoever cuts this story short, it is as if they are abandoning the right road and taking a road into the life-destroying wilderness, where they say, "These trees look like the right way home."

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## COMMENTARY

The ways the people of this world worship are their prayer songs. It is as if Rumi can hear these and is describing the beauty of such a chorus, hidden behind the events of our day-to-day world. This is what propels people through life: The things they love.

They wake up in the morning and once again search and work for what they desire, as if driven by a task master. Some consciously pray for God. Others look for any way to find their heart's desire. Their lives are shaped by what they long for and what they worship.

The purer their prayers, the more fully they see the whole of life. This is the way the path unfolds. There is no shortcut, because it is not something external, but our own selves that are evolving. Soul is awakening to its own true desire.

Amongst the throngs of prayer songs from the ocean of humanity, Rumi sees clearly the brilliant lights of those who have awakened.

It is as if they light up the whole world. Rumi wants us to look for and see such carriers of grace, because these silent beings know this story of love and where it leads. The songs of their lives tell the full story, and inwardly they bring the presence of God and inner secrets to those who seek them.

# Twenty-Nine

A Christian by the name of al-Jarrah says: “A number of Sheik Sadr al-Din’s companions drank with me, and they said, “Jesus is God, as you claim. We confess that to be truth, but we conceal and deny it to preserve the honor of our community.”

Rumi says: God forbid! These are the words of those drunken with the wine of Satan, the misguider. How could it be that Jesus, with such a frail body, who was forced to flee from the plotting Jews, place after place, who stood less than two cubits tall, should be the preserver of the seven heavens—each with a thickness of five hundred years, and from each heaven to the next a distance of five hundred years, and from every earth five hundred years, and from each earth to the next five hundred years, and under this whole Throne the sea of Spirit, whose depth is even greater, even many times the like of it? How could your reason accept that the ruler of all these is the feeblest of forms? Moreover, that before being born, Jesus was the creator of the heavens and the earth? Glory be to God above what the wrongdoers assert!

The Christian says: “His body was mere dust. Dust went to dust, and pure spirit to pure spirit.”

Rumi says: If the spirit of Jesus was God, where went his spirit? Spirit returns to its Origin and Creator. If he was himself the Origin and Creator, where should he go?

The Christian says: "So we found it stated, and we took it as our religion."

Rumi answers: If you find and inherit your parents' false gold, black and corrupt, do you mean you will not change it in for gold of sound quality, free of alloy and adulteration? No, you keep that gold, saying, "We found it so."

Or you inherit from your parents a paralyzed hand, and you find a treatment and a physician to heal that hand. Do you accept it? No, instead you say, "I found my hand paralyzed, and I will not change it." Or if you find salt water on a farm where you were brought up and your parents died, but you are shown another farm whose water is sweet, whose herbs are wholesome, whose people are healthy. Do you move to that other farm and drink the sweet water that would rid you of all diseases and ailments? No, you say, "We found this farm with its salt water and its ailments, and we hold on to what we found."

God forbid! This is not the action or the words of an intelligent person possessed of sound senses. God gave you an intelligence of your own separate from your parents' intelligence, a sight of your own other than your father's sight, a discrimination of your own. Why do you nullify your sight and your intelligence, following an intelligence that misleads and destroys you?

Yutash—his father was a cobbler. Yet when he attained the Sultan's presence, learning the manner of kings and how to be Master of the Sword, and the Sultan conferred on him the highest rank, he never said, "I found my father a cobbler, so I do not want this post. Give me, O Sultan, a shop in the market so I can practice cobbling." Indeed, even a dog, for all its baseness, once it has learned to become a hunter for the Sultan, forgets how it was raised, skulking in rubbish heaps and wastelands and craving for carrion. On the contrary, it follows the Sultan's horses and pursues the game. It is the same with the hawk. When the Sultan has trained it, it never says, "I inherited from my father desolate haunts in the mountains and the devouring of dead things, so I will not heed the Sultan's drum or his game."

If the intellect of beasts can choose something better than what they inherited from their parents, it is monstrous and horrible that a human being, superior to all the inhabitants of the earth in reason and discrimination, should be less than a beast. We take refuge in God from that!

Certainly it is right to say that God honored Jesus and drew him close, so that whoever serves Jesus has served the Lord, whoever obeys him has obeyed the Lord. But since God sends a prophet in every age, manifesting by their hand all that was manifested by Jesus' hand and more, it behooves us to follow that prophet—not for the sake of the prophet, but for the sake of God.

Only God can be served for Its own sake. Therefore, only God is truly loved. Love for all else ends in God. So, love a thing only for God, and seek a thing only for God, until in the end you come to God and love It for Itself.

> *To dress up the Kaaba is a vain desire, God's presence is all the cloth you need.*

Just as worn-out and ragged clothes conceal the elegance of wealth and grandeur, so excellent clothes and fine raiment conceal the mark of beauty and perfection of the saint. When the saint's clothes are in shreds and patches, then their heart is revealed.

## COMMENTARY

There are a thousand religious teachings and traditions handed down in this world, but we must find truth through our own discrimination. There is no other way it can be gained. Without the realization of it through our own effort, we cannot know it.

If we do not question what we were taught as children and do not dig wells for our own source of life-giving water, then it is as if we have locked ourselves in an old, run down house for the rest of our lives because this is what we inherited.

All religions tell great stories of past ages, but this is nothing compared to meeting with and listening to the teacher of our times, who is manifesting the spiritual path today. It is not the master or his outer appearance that is important. Only the living presence of Truth matters. Once again, we must look beneath the surface to discover the reality of this treasure for ourselves.

# Thirty

THERE ARE HEADS that are adorned by crowns of gold, and there are heads whose beautiful curls are merely hidden by jewels and gold. The curls of our heart's beloved arouse love, and love is the throne-room of the heart. But a crown is nothing but metal and stones.

We sought everywhere for Solomon's ring. We found his wisdom far from riches. Abandoning wealth, we found that beautiful treasure. In poverty we took our repose, and our Beloved was pleased with nothing so much as this.

Well, I am a whoremonger. Since I was young, I have been a seller of love. I know this destroys barriers and consumes the veils of the heart. Love is the root of all obedience; all else is mere adornment. If you do not sacrifice, how can you gain your heart's desire? Giving up everything leads to annihilation, the source of all pleasures where no separation exists.

*"And Allah is with the patient."*

In every shop or health potion, every merchandise or trade, the end of the thread is the need of the human spirit. Until the need arises, the end of that thread is hidden. With every religion, every faith, every grace, every miracle, and all the states of the prophets, the end of each thread is within us. Until the need appears, the end of that thread remains invisible.

*"All things are numbered and clearly recorded."*

Someone asks: "Is the source of good and evil one thing or two?"

Rumi says: From the point of view that good and evil are continually at war with one another, the answer is obviously two—since a thing cannot be opposed to itself. But, from the viewpoint that evil is inseparable from good—for good is the giving up of evil, and the giving up of evil is impossible without evil, and were it not for the incitement of evil, no one would ever abandon the good—from this point of view they are not two.

The Magians said that Yazdan is the creator of good things and Ahriman is the creator of evil and hateful things. But desirable things are never separated from hated things. The desirable cannot exist without the hateful, since what we like is always compared to what we hate, and the more we think evil of one thing, the more we desire its opposite. Joy is the end of sorrow; the end of sorrow without joy is impossible. So they are one and indivisible.

Until a thing passes away, its true meaning cannot be known. No one's life can be judged until it is finished, because what starts evil can turn out good. And until words pass away into speech, who can know their purpose?

Whoever criticizes a Sufi in reality does the Sufi a favor, for Sufis shy away from praise. Sufis are enemies of vanity, hence whoever speaks evil of Sufis' egos, speaks evil of the Sufis' enemies, and therefore helps them. "Things become clear through their opposites." So Sufis know the critic is not really their enemy, but their friend.

I am like a smiling garden surrounded by a wall of filth and thorns. Those passing by do not see the garden; they see only the wall and ridicule it. Why, then, would the garden be angry with them? The critics only hold themselves back, because to reach the garden they must first cross the wall. So by finding fault with the wall, they send themselves far away from the garden and work to their own destruction. The Prophet said, “I laugh as I slay,” meaning he kills the unbelievers in one manner, so that unbelievers will not kill themselves in a hundred ways. So, of course, he laughs as he slays.

## COMMENTARY

Popularity means nothing to teachers who search for lovers of God. Why seek out the famous or those with worldly recognition and positions of power when love alone can reveal true treasures? Crowns of gold only hide what the awakened heart longs to see.

Once desires for riches of the world have faded, the Beloved finds us. Poverty becomes our most valuable possession. Having nothing, the Beloved is drawn to fill our void.

If we knew this secret, we would not complain about the things we lack, but would see our emptiness as the bearer of blessings.

*Our Beloved was pleased with nothing so much as this.*

Love tears down walls that separate hearts, including the veils of our illusions. Only when our longing cannot rest for anything else, will we find the end of the thread that draws us.

Seekers must go beyond criticisms to find truth. If they are embarrassed by ridicule, they will never find the garden.

# Thirty-One

THE POLICE ARE ALWAYS in search of thieves to capture, and thieves are always running away. It is rare indeed to find a thief that searches for the police to be captured and thrown in jail. That's not a natural desire for thieves.

God said to Abu Yazid, "What do you desire, Abu Yazid?" He answered, "I desire not to desire."

To be wholly without desire is not a natural desire, since this means emptying ourselves and ceasing to exist. But God wanted to perfect Abu Yazid, to make him a complete Sheikh, so that within him there would be no room for duality or separation, and only complete union would prevail.

There are various classes and different ranks on the spiritual path. Through effort and struggle, some seekers attain a station that refuses every desire. That is within the scope of some. But to never allow even an itch of desire to enter the heart—that is not within the scope of anyone. Only God's love can take that out.

It is stated that, after Mohammad and the Prophets, revelation will not be sent down on anyone else, but this is not true. This is why Mohammad said, "The believer sees with the Light of God." When someone sees with God's Light, they see all things, the first and last, the visible and invisible, for how can anything be hidden from God's Light? If anything is hidden, then that is not God's Light. Therefore this is revelation, whether they call it revelation or not.

When Uthman became caliph, he stepped up into the pulpit. The people waited to see what he would say. He was silent and said nothing. He looked steadily at the people, and a state of ecstasy descended upon them so that they were unable to move and could not tell where they were. Not by a hundred preachings and sermons could he have shown them such an excellent state. Precious lessons were imparted and secrets revealed. Until the very end, he only looked at them like this, not saying a word. Then, just before leaving the pulpit, he said, "It is better for you to have a working Imam than a speaking Imam."

He spoke the truth. If the purpose of speaking is to communicate instruction delicately in order to uplift people, then that had been accomplished many times over without words. So what Uthman said was perfectly true. During the time he was in the pulpit he did no external work visible to the people; he did not pray, he did not go on the pilgrimage, he did not give alms, he did not commemorate God, he did not even speak the caliph's address. Therefore, know that work and action are not limited to outer forms only; rather these visible forms are merely a shadow of the true work of Soul.

The Prophet said, "My Companions are like stars: Whichever of them you follow, you will be guided right." When people follow a star and find their way by it, the star does not speak. Merely by looking at the star, they discover an invisible road and reach their goal. In the same way, it is possible, merely gazing at God's saints, to find the spiritual path. Without words, without questioning, without speech, the purpose is achieved.

In all the world there is nothing more difficult than enduring the ridiculous. Suppose for instance that you have studied a certain book, corrected, amended, and fully recited it. Then someone sitting beside you reads the book all wrong. Can you endure that? No, it is impossible. However, if you never read the book, it makes no difference to you whether anyone reads it wrong or right—you cannot tell the difference. So, enduring the ridiculous is a great discipline.

The prophets and saints do not shirk discipline. Their first discipline is to slay this self that is controlled by desires and lusts. That is the "Greater Holy War." When they achieve this, and establish themselves in the station of security, then wrong and right become revealed to them. Yet they are still engaged in a great struggle, for these mortals do everything wrong. Saints see this and must endure it. If they do not and speak out declaring those mortals wrong, not one person in Heaven or on Earth will stand beside them. But God bestows on saints a great and mighty capacity to endure. Out of a hundred wrong acts, they mention one, so that it will not become difficult to overcome. The other mistakes they hide and even praise, saying, "That wrong of yours is right," so that little by little they can overcome this ignorance.

It is the same when a teacher is teaching a child how to write. When the child writes their first whole line, the child runs to show it to the teacher. In the teacher's eyes it is filled with mistakes, but the teacher speaks to the child with kind words and encouragement, "That is excellent. You have written well. Bravo, bravo! Only this letter is not quite right, this is how it should be. And this other letter looks like this." The teacher calls a few letters wrong out of that line, and shows the child how they ought to be written. The rest is praised, so the child will not lose heart. The child's weakness gathers strength from that approval, and so gradually it is taught and assisted on its way.

We hope that God will grant the Amir all the designs of his heart. We hope God will also grant the Amir those good fortunes that he does not even know of, so that when his heart sees those true gifts of God, he will be ashamed of his former wishes and desires.

That is called a true gift when we find what is beyond our own imagination. For whatever enters a person's imagination is a measure of their ambition and capacity. But God's gift is a measure of God's capacity.

> *"What no eye has seen, nor ear ever heard, nor has entered into any heart."*

You think that God's treasure has been seen by eyes, heard by ears, and the like of it has been conceived by mankind. But, God's bounty transcends all that.

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## COMMENTARY

This discourse hints at the challenges the teacher and advanced spiritual student must face.

It is not human to be without any desire at all, but through emptiness we draw Spirit to reveal the needs of the moment. No effort we make can accomplish what only comes without wanting.

*That is not within the scope of anyone.*

When such a transformation does take place, and the lovers of God realize they deserve no credit for what comes from God, then they must face the criticisms of the world, because who can believe what they say?

Since this situation is nothing they can claim credit for and is nothing they ever desired, they have no other choice but patience. The meaning of this paradox reveals itself through the inner work. This is the place where the unmanifested becomes manifest.

Without a word and without action their heart is moved and true work is done. Free from connotation and interpretation, it is only what it is.

# Thirty-Two

KNOWINGNESS IS THE PERFECT SHEIK. Inspired and true thoughts are His disciples ranked according to their closeness to God. As each thought expands, it comes nearer to knowingness and farther from doubt.

All thoughts suck milk at the breast of certainty and grow. Theory and practice nourish each thought until it approaches certainty. Then thought passes away into certainty, for, in knowingness, thought no longer remains.

The sheikhs and their disciples in the world today are reflections of that Sheikh of Knowingness. The disciples are proof that, although the form of teaching changes from age to age, generation after generation, that Sheikh of Certainty and the Lovers of Truth are eternal and never change.

Errant and doubtful thoughts are the outcast disciples of the Sheikh of Knowingness. Every day they wander further from the truth and fall deeper into darkness.

*"In their hearts is a sickness, and God increases their sickness."*

The masters eat dates, but prisoners eat thorns.

*"Save those who return to truth and do righteous deeds. God changes their evil into good."*

Every experience leads us to certainty, even acts of corruption. Like the cunning thief who repents and joins the police force, all their thieving tricks now become a power for justice. They are more certain than all the other policemen who were never thieves; since, having stolen, they know the ways of thieves. If they should then become a Sheikh they would be perfect, the Elder of the world and the Mahdi of the age.

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## COMMENTARY

The changeless, universal, and eternal Teacher is the awakened God conscious state. Behind every saint, master, and sheikh are the knowingness and certainty that flow out of that awareness. It is the true Teacher of all teachers.

It is a state of consciousness where everything is seen as a whole. Seeing this, we know with a certainty that the fabric of existence is interwoven, because we are a part of all Life and It is a part of us.

All spiritual teachings are a reflection of this inner experience. No matter who we are or where we are in life, we are a part of this path. And everything we do, whether we realize it or not, teaches us and leads us closer to this knowingness.

# Thirty-Three

EVERYONE IS IN THE MIDST of their own need. No living creature can be separated from its need.

*"They are closer to their needs than their fathers and mothers."*

That need is their leash, drawing them this way and that, just like a nose-ring and chain. Who would make a leash for themselves? That is absurd. Someone else must have made it for them.

If we are in the midst of our own need, we are also in the midst of the One who gives us that need. If we are constantly attached to our own leash, we are always connected to the One who draws that leash. But if our eyes are fixed upon our chain, we lose strength and hope. Rather our eyes should be fixed on the One who draws that chain. Then we gladly surrender and accept our limitations. For that leash is around our neck only to reveal the One who holds it.

*"Stay away," they said. "Do not approach."*
*How can I keep away, when you are my need?*

God gives elders a youthful passion that young people never see.

*Great is old age, when the gray hairs appear,*
*And playfulness runs amok.*

Such an elder sees the world with freshness, as if it were new. He laughs and plays.

*They ask, "When someone passes eighty, will they play?"*
*"Will they play before eighty?" I say.*

So the glory of old age is greater than God's display. In spring, God shows Its grace, frail and smiling. In autumn, old age prevails. The worldly garden is ruined. The apparent bounty is gone.

*God is beyond everything that the forces of destruction can sling.*

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi seems to be talking about two separate subjects: First, that we are all in the midst of our need, and our need should lead us on until we become aware of the One who pulls us and draws us through our need.

Second, that old age brings for some a freedom and freshness toward life. Their outer gardens have turned to ruin, yet this seems to open their inner senses to a beauty that youth never sees.

When reading Rumi, it is always wise to ask why he would place such different subjects together. The unstated connection between them often reveals a hidden meaning.

In this case, we can see that he is suggesting that we only find the source of our need after we've lost attachment to the world. It is not old age, but that carefree attitude that comes when we no longer have anything to lose. That's when we accept our helplessness, rather than fighting it, and this places us in the reality of the moment and in the hands of the One who is our need.

# Thirty-Four

RUMI SAYS: I saw our friend in a dream in the form of a wild animal, with the skin of a fox upon him. He was on a small balcony, looking down the stairs. I moved as if to grab him and he raised his hands, leaping about like this and that. Then I saw Jalal al-Tibrizi with him in the form of a weasel.

Our friend shied away, but I caught him when he tried to bite me. I put his head under my foot and squeezed it hard until all its contents came out. I looked at the fineness of his skin and said, "This deserves to be filled with gold and precious stones, pearls and rubies, and things even more excellent than that." Then I said, "I have taken what I wanted. Shy away, shy one. Go where you will and leap whatever direction you like!"

He leapt about because he feared being mastered, yet in being mastered his true happiness lies. No doubt he is formed of meteor fragments, his heart is drenched, and he wants to know all things. He started out on this road with great desires and he struggled hard to keep to the path and take refuge in it, but that is not enough. For the Gnostic is not snared with such nets, nor can game such as Gnosticism be captured this way. If the Gnostic is honest and true, he is completely free to determine who will capture him. He cannot be trapped without his free consent.

My friend, you sat covertly watching for your prey, the true teacher, but that prey was watching you and your cunning as you sat in your hidey-hole. That prey, is a free agent whose ways have no limit. He does not pass by everyone's hole. He passes only the way he, himself, has charted.

> *"God's earth is wide, but none comprehend Its knowledge,*
> *except as It wills."*

Even when subtleties such as these fell upon your tongue and understanding, they were ruined and they lost their fine essence. Just as everything that falls into a Lover of God's mouth and comprehension, whether corrupt or true, is also changed, becoming swathed and wrapped up in graces and miracles.

Do you not see how the rod held in Moses' hand did not remain as it was? So, too, with the Moaning Pillar and the Stick in the hand of the Prophet, and prayer in the mouth of Moses, and iron in David's hand—they did not remain in their original form, but, were changed. So, too, with subtleties and sacred words, when they fall into the hand of darkness and brute intellect, they are changed as well.

*The Kaaba is a tavern for your prayers.*
*So long as it comes from you, your essence shares.*

The unbeliever eats in seven stomachs, and Jalal al-Tibrizi eats in seventy stomachs. Even if he has only one stomach, still he eats in seventy stomachs, because everything that is hateful is hateful just as everything from the beloved is beloved. If our friend had returned, I would have sat with him and counseled him, and not left until he drove Jalal far away. For Jalal is a corrupter of our friend's faith, heart, spirit, and reason. If only Jalal had induced our friend to corrupt practices other than religion, such as drinking wine and singing girls—for those can be put right when treated by a teacher of Divine Grace. But Jalal filled our friend's house with prayer rugs—would that Jalal were rolled up in them and burned, so that our friend might escape from such misleading! But

Jalal has poisoned our friend's trust in the Sheikh of God, ridiculing the Sheikh to his face, while our friend says nothing and destroys himself. Jalal has snared our friend with rosaries, litanies, and prayer carpets.

Perhaps one day God will open the eyes of our friend, and he will see what ruined him and drove him far away from the compassion of the Sheikh. Then he will strike himself with his own hand, saying, "You destroyed me. Now I have committed these heavy crimes and evil acts. It is exactly how they saw it in their revelations—the foulness of my deeds and my vile and sinful beliefs were hidden behind my own back in the corner of my house. I, myself, was concealing them from the Sheikh and burying them, while He saw everything and said, 'What are you hiding? By God's will, if I had summoned those foul forms, they would have marched out before me one by one, visibly, uncovering themselves, telling their true nature, and what they concealed within them.'"

May God save all those who are wronged by these highwaymen who block the path of God by way of "devotion!"

Kings play polo to show the people of their city an example of the warrior's skill—the lopping off of the enemies' heads, rolling them around just as balls roll in the field, the warrior's frontal attack and retreat. This play in the park is only a symbol for that serious business of war. In the same way, the people of God perform spiritual prayers and dances to show something of their inmost heart—how they follow their discipline and their path. The singer who leads them is like the Imam at a ritual Moslem prayer. The people follow his lead. If he sings slowly, they dance slowly. If he sings fast, they dance fast. It is only a reflection of how within their hearts they follow the summoning of God.

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## COMMENTARY

Rituals and acts of traditional devotion trapped this friend and student of Rumi, keeping him from the treasure of the spiritual path.

It was not wine and women that worried Rumi, since he knew his friend would have turned away from the pleasures of the world toward the deeper ecstasy and love of God. But those steeped in religious forms become blinded in a way that blocks them from the Path.

Prayer rugs and rosaries captured his attention, turning him away from the living teacher who knew what he needed. Rumi could see he was running from submission because it made him feel weak. He lacked courage. He sought strength in fundamentalism, but this would only build his ego. The confidence he found in such acts of devotion would keep him from seeing that it is weakness and emptiness that attract God's grace.

He thought he could attain spiritual awareness by his own designs, by practices and rituals, but the Divine Teacher is not snared by tricks and traps. The Divine Teacher is not compelled by anything or anyone, but acts completely out of love.

The true purpose of religious ritual is only to remind us to follow the dance of the Beloved. Foolish are those who become so enamored with traditional practice that they lose its purpose. They are worse off than the ignorant.

# Thirty-Five

I AM AMAZED BY THOSE who know the Koran by heart yet understand nothing of the spiritual states of the Sufis. As the Koran states,

*"And do not obey every paltry asserter."*

Look at the slanderers when they read this, they are exactly the ones who will say, "Do not listen to So-and-so, no matter what they say, for they will act the same way against you."

*"Backbiter, going about with slander, hinderer of good."*

The Koran is a marvelous magician. It speaks clearly to the ears of the hinderers so that they understand but are not one whit wiser. They don't even catch an inkling of the Koran's true delights.

*"God has set a seal. . . ."*

How wonderfully gracious God is! It sets a seal on those who listen and do not understand, argue and yet learn nothing. God is gracious. Its wrath is gracious, and even Its lock is gracious. But Its lock is nothing next to Its unlocking, for the grace of that is indescribable. If I shatter into pieces, it is through the infinite grace of God's unlocking.

Beware, do not think I am sick and dying. That is only a veil. My slayer is this grace of God's and Its incomparableness. The dagger of illness flashes forth to distract the eyes of strangers, so that no profane and defiled eyes can perceive Its secret slaying.

## COMMENTARY

The blindness of many keeps them from seeing the true depth of their own religion. They see only the literal meaning and criticize those who see and know from inner experience.

Do not listen to just anyone who can quote from holy books or assert what sound like sanctified beliefs. The real meaning can only be found in the way it changes us.

Rumi is growing older here and he knows that others see his death approaching, but this outer dying is just an illusion. The real slaying is the shattering of the limited human self by the incomparable, endless grace of God.

# Thirty-Six

ALL FORMS SPRING FROM LOVE, as branches spring forth from their root. No branch exists without its root. Therefore, God is not called a form, since form is the branch. How could God be a branch?

Someone says: "Love, too, cannot be expressed or experienced without form. Hence it is the branch of form."

Rumi responds: Why cannot Love be a form without form? On the contrary, Love is the sculptor of form. A hundred thousand forms are raised up on Love's pottery wheel. Although a painter cannot exist without paintings, still painting is the branch and the painter is the root. As the finger moves, so moves the ring.

Until someone has love for a house, no architect will draw up designs. In the same way, corn is at the price of gold one year, another year it is at the price of dust. The form of corn is the same; therefore, its value comes from love. The sciences you study with such love—in your eyes they are valuable. But when no one pursues them and no one wants to learn from them, then who will teach those sciences?

Someone says: "Love is the want and need for a certain thing. Hence the need is the root, and that thing needed is its branch."

Rumi says: These words of yours are also spoken out of need. First you had the desire for these words, then they were born. The need existed first and then your words came forth. Your need existed in the beginning without words. Therefore, love and need are not the branches of words.

Someone says: "But after all, the goal of that need was these words, so how can the goal be the branch?"

Rumi answers: The branch is always the goal. The tree's roots exist for the sake of its branches.

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi's students have heard him explain how truth is often the opposite of what it seems. It is important to look behind appearances to see reality. So, we find his students here practicing what they think Rumi has taught: to turn the tables on how we see to gain a deeper perspective on life.

However, Rumi was never talking about ideas or mentalized concepts. He wants his students to catch and experience the palpable, living truth behind all of life.

Our minds can see how love is inspired by beautiful forms, but Rumi is pointing far beyond this to the original Love that gives beauty its attraction. That is what brings form into existence. Beauty is a branch of that Love. We can see here that his students were talking about human love, while Rumi was describing something eternal, known only to Soul.

He was not speaking of mere wants and desires. He was describing the original need that gives birth to everything we experience, both desirable and undesirable. Our life is the branch of that Love. Our awakening and unfoldment is the goal of that divine Gift.

# Thirty-Seven

RUMI SAYS: The stories that have been spread against this girl are lies and should go no further. But I can see that even though we may put aside these rumors as false, something has settled in the imagination. Our imagination and heart are like a vestibule—thoughts first enter the vestibule, then they move into the house.

This whole world is like one house, and every image that lodges in our deepest thoughts must appear and become visible in the house. For instance, take this house in which we are seated—the form of it first became visible in the heart of the architect, then it came into being. Imagination, daydreams, and thoughts are the vestibule of this house. Whatever you see entering the vestibule, know that one day it will become visible in the house. And all these things, good and evil alike, that you see in the world today appeared in the vestibule first, before becoming visible here.

When God wishes to produce rare and wonderful things in this world—orchards, gardens, meadows, and sciences—It first implants the desire and demand for them in our inward hearts. And so, everything you see in this world existed first in that inner world. For instance, what you see in the dew also exists in the ocean, for this dew is from that ocean. It is the same with the creation of heaven and earth, and all the other marvels: God implanted the desire for these in the spirits of the ancients, and then the world came into being.

The philosophers who say that the world is eternal—how can they be taken seriously? Their statement simply means the world was never created in time, and this claim is impossible to prove. But those who say it was created in time—they are the saints and the prophets who are more ancient than the world. God implanted desire for the world within their spirits, and only then did the world appear. So they know for a fact and report out of their own experience that the world was created in time.

For instance, those of us who watched when this house was built know it did not exist until a few years ago. If living creatures were born in this house, such as scorpions, mice, snakes, and other creatures, to them this house was already standing. If they should say, "This house is eternal," that is no proof to us, for we saw when this house was created. Termites and ants that have grown up in the walls and woodwork know nothing else, the same as people who have grown up within the house of this world. Here they sprout up, and here they will die, knowing nothing else. If they say the world is eternal, that is no proof to the prophets and saints who existed millions of years before the world. Why speak of years? This is no place for numbers of years, they are infinite and beyond counting. They saw this world come into existence, just as you have seen when this house was first raised.

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## COMMENTARY

Rumors circulating about a girl launch Rumi into a discussion of the subtle ways that negative images creep into our subconscious and color the way we see. Our perceptions and beliefs are often shaped by impressions lurking within us. Long before we dream about what we want, our worldview has been formed. If we are not aware of what we let into our subconscious, we become the unknowing effect, and our reactions end up creating situations that often make things worse.

We are always messengers, whether we realize it or not. Hidden behind everything we do is an attitude and a state of consciousness that carries our point of view into the world. We are always being channels, and our lives are the results of what flows through us. When God wishes to bring about changes, It inspires a greater awareness within us. Either we are choosing consciously to see from the whole, or we are carried along by the worldly river of reactions.

This leads Rumi into a discussion about those who are the saints and have seen the origins of creation. Some call this a theoretical ideal. Others claim that Rumi was speaking from belief alone.

However, these people are the ones speaking theoretically and from their beliefs, since they simply don't know how to accept what Rumi is saying. How could the saints have witnessed creation? He must be speaking allegorically or mythologically, they say.

Nevertheless, Rumi was speaking from personal experience. That is why he said:

> *The philosophers who say that the world is eternal—how can they be taken seriously? Their statement simply means the world was never created in time, and this claim is impossible to prove.*

In other words, that's just theoretical talk, but he has seen the moment of creation. He knows the state of consciousness where this is reality, where time itself came into being.

Experiencing the higher stations and states changes how we see. We witness there how thoughts emerge in the subconscious before making their way into the imagination, and only after that do they enter into our consciousness and finally we see them in the world. Our inner experiences shape our day-to-day life, whether we are aware of them or not.

That was why Rumi raises this subject of seeing creation: To show us how difficult it is to accept things that are beyond what we know.

Our beliefs are so strong that we only see what fits our perspective. We imagine that others are fooling themselves, but cannot see our own blinders. This is the kind of thinking that colors our subconscious and shapes what we see and are able to accept.

# Thirty-Eight

THE PROPHET WAS SEATED with his Companions. Some unbelievers began to denounce and lecture him. He said, "Well, you all agree there is one person in the world who receives revelation. Revelation descends upon him—it does not descend on everyone. That person has certain marks and signs in his actions and words, and in his mien and in every part of him the token and mark can be seen. Since you have seen those tokens, turn your faces towards him and hold to him firmly, so he can be your protector."

They were all confounded by his argument and were left with nothing more to say. So they put their hands on their swords and began to threaten, torment, and insult his Companions. The Prophet said, "Be patient, so they cannot say they have prevailed over us. They want to make the religion manifest by force. God will manifest this religion."

For some time the Companions prayed and pronounced the name of Mohammad secretly. Then, after a while, the revelation came: "You too unsheathe the sword and make war!"

Mohammad is not called "unlettered" because he was incapable of writing or reading. He is called "unlettered" because with him writing and wisdom were innate, not taught. He who inscribes characters on the face of the moon—is such a man not able to write? And what is there in all the world that he does not know, seeing that all people learn from him? What can the partial intellect know that the Universal Intellect does not possess?

The fact that we compose books and create buildings is nothing new. We have seen this done before, and we merely add to what we have already seen. But those who bring into this world something new of their own account, they are the Universal Intellect. We are capable of learning and need to be taught. The Universal Intellect is the teacher and is not in need. So, if we investigate all trades, at the root and origin of them all we find revelation. We have learned everything from the prophets and the Universal Intellect.

When Cain slew Abel and didn't know what to do next, he saw a raven kill another raven, dig the earth, and bury the body, scattering dust on its head. Cain learned from the raven how to make a grave and how to bury the dead. So it is with all the professions. Everyone who possesses a partial intellect is in need of learning, and the Universal Intellect is the source they are seeking. The prophets and saints have united the partial intellect and Universal Intellect, so the two have become one.

For instance, the foot learns from the mind how to walk. The hand learns from the heart how to embrace. The eye and ear learn how to see and hear. If the heart and mind did not exist, how could the body function?

This body is coarse and gross compared to both mind and heart. Without their subtlety and freshness, the body remains useless and crude. So the partial intellect is like a tool for the Universal Intellect, and we learn and find our purpose from there.

Someone says, "Remember us in your intention. Intention is the root of the matter. If there are no words, let there be no words. Words are the branch."

Rumi says: Well, intention first exists in the inner world before entering this world of form. So if form does not matter, what is the purpose of this world? If you plant only the kernel of an apricot stone, nothing will grow. If you plant it with its husk, then it becomes a tree. From this we know that form also has a function. Yes, prayer is an inward matter: "There is no prayer without the heart being present." But it is still necessary to bring the prayer into form. With outward words, genuflection, and prostration, you gain benefit and attain your desire.

The outer form of prayer is temporary; the inner spirit never ends. For the Spirit of the world is an infinite ocean, the body but a limited shore. Therefore, continual prayer belongs only to the spirit, but that inward prayer must manifest. Until intention and form are wedded, there are no children born.

When you say that words are the branch, this is only a relative term. Until the branch exists how can the term "root" gain its meaning? So the meaning of root came out of this branch. If the branch had not existed, it could never have had a name. When you speak of woman, there must also be man. When you speak of a Master, there must be a student. When you speak of the Ruler, there must be one ruled.

## COMMENTARY

From the beginning of this discourse, Rumi starts talking about the way that spiritual truth makes its way into this world. This becomes even clearer at the end when we hear his response to a student. He doesn't focus on the root and source as so often before, but rather he emphasizes the importance of outward form.

This is a clue to the hidden meaning of this discourse.

Now we can go back to the beginning and look again at where he tells a story about those who try to prevent spiritual truth from entering this world. People object to it, since it is opposed to their beliefs. It seems wrong to them, so they try to stop it by force.

Rumi's answer to this is that truth comes into this world in a universal way: Through those who know. Everyone agrees with this. We all learn from the men and women who bring a new understanding into this world. Civilization is led by their guidance. However, these leaders face opposition and resistance because they are bringing out something new.

People use power to threaten those who bring out truth, but it finds a way to manifest on its own. Rumi said: “Be patient.” It should not be forced, since it comes in its own time, in its own way. This is how to work with truth and help it take birth on Earth. There is a time to act and a time to wait. Knowing when to speak and when to remain silent is a part of working with Truth.

Those who know the secrets of Life do not learn it through an educational system. They know the source of all mankind’s wisdom through inner experience. They inscribe words across the face of the moon, meaning that they leave a trace so subtle that it is rarely seen and yet shines upon the whole world and changes it.

It is the Universal Intellect or knowingness that is the true teacher. We all learn from it, but it still requires individuals to manifest this teaching. It must assume form to touch this world.

*Until intention and form are wedded, there are no children born.*

In other words, those who are lovers of God must also realize that they have a responsibility to manifest and bring truth into this world. This, too, is a part of spiritual growth. Rumi only hints at this for the sake of those who can grasp this subtle meaning.

# Thirty-Nine

RUSAM AL-DIN ARZANJANI, before entering the service and society of dervishes, was a great debater. Wherever he went, he engaged vigorously in argument and controversy. He used to argue well and spoke excellently, but once he took up the company of dervishes his heart turned completely against debate.

"Whoever desires to sit next to God, let them sit with lovers of God." These intellectual sciences are a game and a waste of life, compared to the spiritual experiences of the dervishes.

When people grow up and become adults, with maturity and wisdom, they no longer spend their hours in play, or if they do, they keep it hidden out of embarrassment, so that no one will see them. This intellectual practice of arguing is like the wind, and people are like dust. When wind stirs dust, wherever it goes it makes the eyes sore. You find nothing but wrangling, strife, and contention with it. People may be dust, but their eyes fill with water over every disputed word.

*"You see their eyes overflowing with tears."*

Now, when rain pours down upon the dust, instead of wind, exactly the opposite happens. With water, that dust turns to soil, and then fruit, grass, fragrant herbs, violets, and roses grow.

Desirelessness is the way to attain your desires. Whatever you have longed for will come to you on this path, whether the shattering of armies, victory over your enemy, capturing kingdoms, bringing people to obedience, excelling your contemporaries, or elegance of speech. When you have chosen the way of poverty, these things come to you. No one has ever traveled this road and had cause to complain, contrary to other ways where only one out of a hundred thousand reach their goal, and even they do not always find happiness and peace. For, every desire has many branching paths to reach that goal. It is long and arduous, full of pitfalls and obstacles, and in the end it is possible those twisting paths will fall short of your desire.

However, once you enter the path of desirelessness and practice it, God bestows on you kingdoms and worlds you never imagined, and you feel quite ashamed of what you longed for at first. "Ah!" you cry. "With such reality in existence, how could I have sought after such foolishness?" But God says, "If only you had risen above such desires, becoming detached from them and seeing them for what they were, all would have been well. Yet now, when they enter your thoughts and you avoid them for My sake, My grace is infinite, so of course I make them attainable to you."

So it happened with Mohammad. Before he attained his goal and became famous, he listened to the elegant speech and eloquence of the Arabs, and he wished that he too could speak so well. Yet, once the invisible worlds were revealed to him, and he became drunk with God, his heart turned completely against that desire and longing. God declared, "I have given you the elegance and eloquence that you sought." The Prophet answered, "Lord, of what use are they to me? I am indifferent to them and have no desire for them." God replied, "Do not worry. Your original desire shall come to pass, and yet your indifference will also remain, so that desire cannot harm you."

God bestowed on him such speech that the entire world, from his time until today, has composed and still composes volumes expounding it, and yet people fall short of comprehending all that it contains.

God also declared, "Your Companions, out of weakness and fear for their lives, whisper your name only in secret. But I will publish your greatness abroad so that men and women will shout it aloud in sweet intonations five times daily on the high minarets in all regions of the world. Your name will be famous in the east and the west."

It is the same with anyone who gambles their life upon this way, to them all objectives—whether religious or mundane—become attainable. None have ever had cause to complain.

The words of Saints are true coins; the words of others are but imitation. Imitation is a branch of true coins. Imitation is like a wooden carving in the shape of a foot; that wooden foot was filched from a real foot and shaped to its measure. If no foot existed, how could there be a copy? Therefore some speech is true coin, and some imitation. They resemble each other. Only discrimination can recognize the difference. This critical perception is real faith.

Do you not see how Moses threw down his rod and it became a serpent, and the staffs and ropes of the magicians also became serpents, but Pharaoh who lacked insight saw no difference between them, while Moses who possessed discernment could see truth from sorcery? Through discrimination Moses became a believer. So we realize that faith is discrimination.

The root of our judgment is Divine revelation. But after mingling with the thoughts, senses, and desires of mortal creatures, that original grace has vanished. How does our judgment resemble the delicacy of revelation now?

This is like the water that flows down from Turut towards Konya. There, at its fountainhead, see how pure and fine it is! But once it enters the city and passes through the gardens, quarters, and houses of the inhabitants, so many people wash their hands, faces, feet, and others parts in it, and their clothes and carpets, and the urine of all the people and the dung of horses and mules is poured into it. Look at this water when it passes out the other side of the city! It is still the same water, able to turn dust into clay, quench the thirsty, make the field green, yet discrimination can see the water is polluted and has lost its original clarity.

Water that never grows stale—that is what we need. Water that can cleanse the impurities of the world, and yet the world leaves no trace in it. It retains its limpid and clear state and is never tainted. This is the Water of Truth.

Someone asks: "If a man shouts out during prayer and weeps, is his prayer valid?"

Rumi says: The answer depends on the circumstances: If he wept because he experienced a world beyond this sensible one—which, after all, is called "water of the eyes"—then that is the very object of prayer and makes it even more perfect. But if he cried out over worldly things, such as anger from defeat by an enemy, or envy for those who have more money than they need while he possesses nothing, then his prayer is void and useless.

So, we realize that faith is discrimination, distinguishing truth from falsehood and the true coin from the fake. These words are valuable to everyone possessing that critical perception, but are wasted on those who cannot see the difference. If these words fall into the hands of those who cannot discern, it is like giving precious pearls to children who don't know their value. Later, if you offer them apples they will gladly trade them for pearls, since they know no better.

Abu Yazid, when a child, was taken by his father to school to learn jurisprudence. When he was brought before the schoolmaster he asked, "Is this the jurisprudence of God?" They said, "This is the jurisprudence of Abu Hanifa." He said, "I want the jurisprudence of God." When he was brought before the grammar teacher, he asked, "Is this the grammar of God?" The teacher said, "This is the grammar of Sibawaihi." Abu Yazid said, "I do not want it." He spoke this way wherever his father took him. His father could do nothing with him and, finally, let him be. Later he came to Baghdad upon his quest, and as soon as he saw Junaid he shouted, "This is the jurisprudence of God!"

How could a lamb not recognize its own mother on whose milk it has been suckled? So, forget the outward form.

There was a certain Sheikh who kept his disciples standing with their hands folded in service. They asked him, "Sheikh, why don't you let this class sit down? This is not the practice of dervishes, this is the custom of princes and kings." He replied, "No. Be silent. You must respect this way to gain full benefit. Though devotion lies within the heart, yet 'the outer is the frontispiece of the inner.'"

From the frontispiece of a book, people know what it contains. From outward signs of reverence and bowing their heads, we see what admiration they have inwardly and how they look to God. If we find no indication of respect, outwardly, this shows that inwardly they are rude and have no esteem for lovers of God.

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## COMMENTARY

In the last discourse, Rumi showed that when the time is right we must become involved in the manifestation of truth in this world. This is a part of spiritual growth.

In this discourse, Rumi explains why we must first learn to give up our personal desires to walk the spiritual path. Once we let go of the endless wants that fill the heads and hearts of most people, we will never have any cause for complaint. How could we complain, when everything we gain is more than our desire?

Those who follow the path of desirelessness soon realize that the things they receive are far greater than anything they thought they needed. Fame and fortune seem insignificant. What we once called success now seems trite and empty. You can own all the kingdoms of the world, but when you die you cannot take them with you. However, once you gain the realms of your own Self, they are never lost.

The key is discrimination. How else can truth be known except through recognition within the depth of ourselves? How else can we distinguish the original from an imitation? The story of Abu Yazid illustrates how we know reality when we find it. Our true Self recognizes it.

The streams of thoughts and beliefs of the world have become polluted. Our awareness was originally pure, like a river entering a city, but has become filled with all the dirt and waste from centuries of civilization. This is why we need to return back to that source within ourselves that discriminates and recognizes pure truth. This is where we find the Water of Life that cannot be sullied and purifies all things.

# Forty

JAUHAR, THE SULTAN'S SERVANT, asks Rumi a question: "We have been told that we must repeat the Muslim credo five times during our lifetime. What if we don't understand the words, or do not memorize them correctly? After death, what questions will we be asked, seeing that we have forgotten even the questions we were taught?"

Rumi replies: If you forget what you have learned, then of course you become a clean slate suitable for questions that you have not learned.

Now, this minute, you are listening to me. You accept some part of what I say because you have heard similar things before, but some you only half accept, and concerning other things you hesitate. No one hears this rejection or acceptance, or the debate going on within you. Even though you are listening, no sound or voice comes to your ear from within you. If you search inwardly, you will find no instrument of speech.

This coming of yours to visit me is itself a question without a throat or tongue, namely, "Show me a way, and explain what you have shown." My sitting with you, whether silent or speaking, is an answer to your hidden questions. When you wait upon the king, that is a question addressed to the king and an answer. Every day the king questions his servants without tongue: "How do you stand? How do you eat? How do you look?" If anyone has a wry look within them, their answer inevitably comes out awry and they cannot give a straight answer. In the same way someone who stammers, however much they wish to speak straight, is unable to do so. A goldsmith who rubs gold against a stone is questioning the gold, and gold answers, "This is I. I am pure." Or, "I am alloyed."

> *The crucible knows after you've been tested whether you are gold or merely copper with gold covering.*

Hunger is a questioning of nature: "There is a crack in the body's house. Give a brick. Give clay." Eating is an answer: "Take." Not eating is also an answer: "Wait until later. The brick is not yet dry." The physician comes and takes our pulse. That is a question—the throbbing of the vein is the answer. Examining the urine is an unspoken question and answer. To cast a seed into the ground is a question: "Will you give fruit?" The growing of the tree is an answer without a tongue. Because the answer is wordless, the question must be wordless, too.

A king read three letters from the same man, but did not answer. The subject wrote a complaint, saying, "Three times now I have petitioned your majesty. Let your majesty at least say whether my petition has been accepted or rejected." The king wrote on the back of the letter, "Do you not know that refusing an answer is an answer itself, and that the answer to a fool is silence?"

A tree's not growing is a refusal to answer and is an answer itself. Every motion people make is a question. Whatever happens to them, whether sorrow or joy, is an answer. If they hear a pleasant answer, they show their thanks. Appreciation is expressed by asking the same kind of question again. If they hear an unpleasant answer, they quickly ask God's forgiveness and do not repeat that kind of question.

> *"If only, when Our might came upon them, they had been humble! But their hearts were hard."*

In other words, they did not understand that the answer they received came from the question they asked.

*"And Satan decked out fair to them what they were doing."*

This means they saw the answer to their question, but said, "This ugly answer is not appropriate to our fair question." They did not realize that smoke comes from the fuel, not the fire. The drier the fuel, the cleaner the flame. If you entrust your garden to a gardener, and you smell a disagreeable odor, suspect the gardener and not the garden.

A man once asked, "Why did you kill your mother?" The other answered, "I saw her sleeping with a strange man." The first man said, "You should have killed the stranger." The second one said, "Then I would be killing someone every day."

Therefore, whatever happens to you, correct your own self, then you will not have to fight with someone every day. If others say, "Everything is from God," we reply: "Then to reproach one's own self and to let the world be is also from God."

This is like the story of a boy who shook down apricots from a tree and ate them. The owner of the orchard caught him and said, "Aren't you afraid of God's punishment?" The boy said, "Why should I be afraid? The tree belongs to God, and I am God's servant. God's servant ate God's fruit!" The owner said, "Wait and see what answer I shall give you. Fetch a rope, tie him to this tree, and beat him until the answer is made clear!" The boy said, "Aren't you afraid of God's punishment?" The owner answered, "Why should I be afraid? You are God's servant, and this is God's stick. I am beating God's servant with God's stick!"

The moral is that this world is like an echo—whatever you say, whether good or evil, you hear the same back from the mountain. If you think, "I spoke beautifully and the mountain gave an ugly answer," this is impossible. When the nightingale sings in the mountain, does the mountain return the voice of a raven or a donkey? Know for certain then that you have spoken like a donkey!

*Speak sweetly when crossing the mountain pass.*
*Why do you bray like an ass?*
*The azure sky sends back the note*
*Of sweetness from your own throat.*

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## COMMENTARY

Someone asks Rumi about a Muslim tradition, where each person is questioned after death. Rumi explains the real meaning of what takes place.

We do not need to memorize answers or remember intellectual concepts. What we find after death are the silent questions and silent answers that occurred throughout our life. What suddenly becomes visible is our spiritual dialogue with life. Some only see this clearly and plainly for the first time after crossing over to the next world. However, this interchange is secretly taking place every moment.

Whatever we do is a statement made without words, and whether we are aware of the response or not, the world always answers. The echo is always a perfect match. It can't be anything else, since it is simply life's reflection of our own creation. Reality mirrors back to us a perfect image of our own thoughts and actions.

Many think the answer is unfair or belongs to someone else. We can't recognize the donkey's bray as our own.

If you don't like the answers, change your questions.

# Forty-One

WE ARE LIKE BOWLS on the surface of the water. The direction in which a bowl moves is controlled not by the bowl, but by the water.

Someone says: "That's a general statement. But some people know they are on the surface of the water, while some do not."

Rumi says: If that is a general statement, then the specific statement, "The heart of the believer is between two fingers of the All-Merciful" would mean nothing. It was also said, "The All-Merciful has taught the Koran." This cannot be a general statement. God taught all the sciences, so what is this particular reference to the Koran?

Similarly, "He created the heavens and the earth." Why, specifically, the heavens and the earth, since He created all things? True, all bowls travel on the surface of the water of Omnipotence and Divine Will, but it is poor manners to refer to God as "O Creator of dung and farting and wind-breaking." Instead we say, "O Creator of the heavens," and "O Creator of intelligence." So this distinction, although general, is an indication of choiceness and value.

The upshot is that the bowls travel on the surface of the water, and the water carries one bowl so that every other bowl gazes upon it.

The water carries another bowl so that every bowl runs away instinctively and feels ashamed seeing it. The water inspires them to run away and implants in them the power to move away, saying, "O God, take us farther away." But in the first case they say, "O God, bring us closer to this one."

The person who thinks this is a general situation says, "Both bowls are equally controlled by the water." We say, "If only you saw the grace, beauty, and pretty sauntering of this bowl on the water, you would have no desire to call such movement 'general.'" In the same way, no lover would say, "My beloved and I are co-partners in work, dung, and filth that comes from two people sharing a space with bodies that decay." Who could give such a cold description of their beloved? Anyone who spoke like this would seem more like an evil enemy.

If you only recognize the general attributes, not seeing our particular beauty, it is not proper arguing with you, for our words are commingled with beauty, and it is wrong to reveal beauty to those who do not love it.

> *"Share not wisdom with those not ready to hear it, lest you do wisdom harm. Do not hold back truth from those who are ready, lest you do them wrong."*

This is the science of potential; it is not the science of argumentation. Roses and fruit blossoms do not bloom in the autumn, for that would confront and compete with autumn. It is not in the nature of the rose to confront autumn. If the sun has done its work, the rose comes out in its proper season, otherwise it draws in its head and retires within its stem. Autumn says to it, "If you are not barren, confront me!" The rose says, "In your presence I am barren and a coward. Say whatever you will!"

*O monarch of all truthful folk,*
*How can I be called a hypocrite?*
*With living people I am alive,*
*And with the dead as dead I sit.*

If some old crone without any teeth, her face all wrinkled like the back of a lizard, came to you and said, "If you are a man and a true youth, behold, I have come before you! Behold the horse and the fair one that sits upon it. Behold the open field. Show manliness, if you are a man!" You would say, "God be my refuge! I am no man. What they have told you is all lies. If you are the mate, unmanliness is most attractive!"

A scorpion comes and raises its stinger against your leg, saying, "I have heard you are someone who laughs and is happy. Laugh, so that I can hear your laughter." In such a case you would say, "Now that you have come I have no laughter. What they have told you is lies. My desire to laugh has been replaced with the hope that you will go far away!"

Someone says to Rumi: "When you sighed a moment ago, the ecstasy departed. Do not sigh, so the ecstasy will not leave."

Rumi answers: Sometimes that ecstasy departs if you do not sigh. Otherwise, Mohammad would not have said,

*"Abraham was a man who sighed, a merciful man."*

Nor is it right to openly display obedience to God, for obedience itself brings ecstasy.

You say this because you want the ecstasy to continue. When someone induces ecstasy, you look after them to continue your experience. This is like shouting to a sleeper, "Arise! It is day. The caravan is off." Others say, "Don't shout. People are in ecstasy. You will drive their ecstasy away." You answer, "That ecstasy of sleep is destruction, this ecstasy of wakefulness is birth and growth." They say, "Don't make a confusion, for this shouting is disturbing." You answer, "This shouting will make the sleepers think. How can they think while sleeping?"

So shouters are of two kinds. If the shouters are greater in knowledge, their shouting will cause an increase in awareness. Since they are people of knowledge and of wakefulness, when they awaken others out of their slumber they show the sleepers their own world and draw them higher. However, when the awakener is lower in awareness and awakens others, the gaze of those sleeping is pulled down.

Since the shouter's knowledge is lower down, inevitably the gaze of those shouted at drops downward to the lower world.

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## COMMENTARY

This shows how specific all of Rumi's discourses are. They might sound general but they are not. He is always pointing to a spiritual element at work right then in their midst.

In this case he is describing Spirit as the moving force behind the spiritual path. This is not just a broad statement. It is something specific to the moment.

Rumi says we are attracted to some people and lifted up by them, not only from what they say and do, but because of something deeper—the currents of the water upon which we all move. Who do you think he is talking about? Why is he raising this?

Rumi is talking about the very reason his students are there in the room listening to him, and why we are reading his words today. He is trying to show what is behind this attraction to him and where this influence is coming from. He wants us to look beyond his words to see and touch what moves him, since that is what has brought us to his presence.

Rumi sighs when he realizes that his words have gone completely over the head of one of his visitors.

A student notices immediately a change in the room. The stream of spiritual current flowing through Rumi's words dropped down. He asks Rumi not to sigh to keep the bliss and inspiration alive.

Rumi uses this to illustrate the same point he was making previously. It is not his sighing that changed the flow of bliss. His sigh was merely a reflection of that shifting current. It is Spirit that brings ecstasy, and we must learn to move wherever it moves, whether up or down.

What happens to our laughter when a scorpion appears? How can we expect to feel the same in the presence of ugliness as we do with beauty? These feelings that rise and fall within us are reflections of the reality dwelling in the things we face.

> *This is the science of potential; it is not the science of argumentation.*

It is the potential behind life that draws Soul to this path. Argumentation drives away spiritual bliss because it is at odds with the reality of things. Our dialogue and interchange with Spirit is the alignment that opens the inner secrets and leads us into the depths.

In response to the student asking him not to sigh, Rumi offers a fascinating observation and explanation about the loss of bliss: When trying to teach another or to awaken them to something important, we should ask first whether it is our place to teach, or whether it is our time to learn.

To correct or criticize a person who is spiritually more aware only brings us down. We also miss an opportunity to learn and grow, and we bring others down as well. The visitor completely missed the inner example Rumi was pointing to. The student recognized it immediately through his inner connection with Spirit. However, he also missed the full meaning of the experience. That's why he tried to correct Rumi as well. He didn't look deeply enough to see the greater example of how Rumi was moving with Spirit. So, Rumi's comment was meant for him, since it was a subtle point that could only be grasped by those who could follow the currents in the moment.

In other words, the lesson for the student was that Spirit moves and changes as it will. We need to work with Spirit, not try to change it or make it fit our desires. Moving with Spirit, we discover that it is behind all things, including the rise and fall of ecstasy. It leads us down to earth at times, just as it can lead us into the heavenly worlds. Each movement of life is specific for the moment and the people. There is wisdom and truth behind everything.

# Forty-Two

PEOPLE INTERESTED IN SCHOLARLY STUDIES are afraid that if they religiously join our meetings they will forget and lose all they have learned. On the contrary, coming here, their sciences gain soul. For all sciences, when they acquire soul, are like empty bodies that spring to life. The heart of knowledge originates beyond this world of letters and language. It comes to us from the world where speech is without sound or sign.

*"And to Moses, God spoke directly."*

Well, God did not speak with letters and sounds, with throat and tongue. Letters require a throat and lips to be heard. God is far above lips, mouth, and throat. So prophets in the higher world speak with God in a way that partial intelligences cannot imagine or understand. Yet the prophets come down from that world without letters into this world of letters and become children for the sake of these children. Thus, Mohammad said, "I was sent as a teacher."

Although the masses of people in this world do not reach the spiritual states of the prophets, still this world derives strength from the saints and grows and finds comfort in them. In the same way, a newborn baby, not knowing or recognizing its mother in detail, still finds comfort and derives strength from her. Just as fruit is nourished by the branch—becoming sweet and ripe—yet knows nothing of the tree, so, the great saints with their letters and speech nourish and bring strength to people, even though the masses do not know them.

There is fixed within soul—beyond reason, letter and sound—a macrocosm. But look at how many seek out those crazy gurus who make outrageous claims. People think, "What these gurus say may be true. Such things might exist, even if they are wrong in this case. Not everything can be known by reason and logic." But this doesn't mean that everything outside of reason and logic is true. "Every nut is round, but not every round thing is a nut," is an example of that.

Although a saint has a state that cannot be expressed through words and writing, still in the saint's presence reason grows and develops. This cannot be found from those false teachers around whom the masses circle. No one who visits them is transformed beyond their own state, and no one finds wholeness through such guidance. People might think they have found completeness, but that is not what we call completeness. Just as a child who is separated from its mother might find some care and comfort for a moment with someone else, this is not what we call real care and comfort. The child can only find that from its mother who never stops caring.

Physicians say that whatever is agreeable to the temperament and brings satisfaction gives strength and purifies the blood. However, this is only true when someone has no disease. For instance, bilious people find sour things agreeable and sugar disagreeable, because their taste is distorted by distemper. So, the truly agreeable is what agreed with them before they fell sick.

For example, a woman breaks her hand and hangs it in a sling so that it heals crookedly. Her surgeon must set the bones straight and put them back to their original form. This is not agreeable to the woman. Indeed, it is painful. Being crooked is much more agreeable to her. So the surgeon says, "First, your hand was straight and that brought you comfort. When you broke it, you felt pain and suffering. Although being crooked is more agreeable to you now, this is false comfort and means nothing."

Beings in the world of pure spirit find the commemoration of God and absorption in God agreeable, like the angels. However, if they fall sick through connection with the body and eating sour things becomes agreeable to them, then the prophets and saints who are physicians, say, "This is not really what you want. This agreeableness is a lie. Your real desire is for something else that you've forgotten. What is agreeable to your original and sound temperament is what you truly want. But now that this sickness seems appealing, you do not recognize the truth."

A Sufi was seated before a grammarian. The grammarian said, "A word must be one of three things: either it is a noun, a verb, or a particle." The Gnostic tore his robe and cried, "Alas! Twenty years of my life striving and seeking have gone to the winds, for I labored in anticipation that there was another Word beyond this. Now you have destroyed my hope." Though the Sufi had already attained the Word he sought, he said this to arouse the grammarian.

Hassan and Hosein, the grandsons of Mohammad, when they were young, saw a man performing his religious ablutions the wrong way. They wanted to teach him. So, Hasan said, "My brother and I can't agree about how to perform ablution. Can we each do ablution in front of you, so that you can judge which one is right?" The man agreed. Then, after seeing them, he said, "Oh, children, I now see how I have been performing ablution all wrong. You've taught me the true way. Thank you."

The greater the number of guests, the larger they make the house, the more furniture they bring in, and the more food they prepare. This is why the stature of little children is small, and their thoughts, too, which are their guests, are appropriate to the house of their bodies. They know nothing except milk and nurses. When they grow older, the guests, their thoughts, also increase, and their house of reason, perception, and discrimination expands. When the guests of passionate love arrive, they are too much for the house. They demolish it and build anew.

God's veils and God's scouts and troops cannot be contained in God's house. God's veils cannot hide Its door. To accommodate infinite guests, an infinite station is required. When God's veils are hung, they shed light and dissolve shadows so that the secret things become manifest. This is opposite of the veils in this present world that add to the shadows.

*I suffer wrongs unsaid.*
*None hear my excuses or cries.*
*As the candle weeps,*
*No one knows if the tears it sheds*
*Come from its closeness to fire,*
*Or from a longing for the bee's wax*
*And sweet honey, now parted.*

This whole world is the prisoner of destiny, and destiny is the prisoner of beauty. Beauty reveals, it does not conceal.

God has certain servants that are men who, when they see a woman in a veil, command her, "Remove your veil so we may see your face and who you are. When you pass by veiled, we are distracted, wondering, 'What manner of person is this that passes before us?' We are not like those who are attracted and enslaved by you if they see your face. It has been a long time now that God has transformed us from such innocence and freed us from such charms. We are quite secure. You will not disturb us or tempt us. But it is when we do not see you that we are disturbed, wondering, 'Who is this?'"

These men are very different from others who are driven by their desires. If other men see the faces of beauty, they are captivated and become disturbed. Therefore, it is better for these beauties to hide themselves, so as not to tempt such men. As for the Sufis, however, it is better to show their faces to them, to spare God's servants this distraction.

Someone says: "In Khvarizm, no one falls in love, because in Khvarizm there are many beautiful women. No sooner do they see a beauty and fix their hearts on her, than they see another still more beautiful, and the first one is forgotten."

Rumi says: If there are no lovers for the beauties of Khvarizm, then certainly there are lovers of Khvarizm, itself, seeing the many beauties in that land. But the "Khvarizm" I speak of is poverty, where countless mystical and spiritual forms show their faces. Each one that you turn to and find comfort in leads to yet another more beautiful, so you forget all that came before. On and on this leads—*ad infinitum*. So let us be lovers of poverty, where such true beauties are found.

## COMMENTARY

Poverty is the spiritual practice of giving up all the desires of humanity in order to find the original and innate desires of Soul. This is where true beauty and satisfaction are discovered. And no sooner does such spiritual beauty enter into our lives than we discover there is more, another step, a deeper ocean, a more fulfilling state of being.

This is not learning something new. It is unlearning and restoring us to our original nature. We have picked up the illness of this world and have become so used to disease that we find it comfortable. We are afraid of health.

Like the scholars that Rumi refers to in his opening line, people are worried about losing the things they've gained through their effort and hard work, not realizing what they have forgotten and lost in the process. They find comfort in their emptiness and suffering, because it's become their home and what they know. This is why they avoid the spiritual side of their lives and teachers such as Rumi, because they are afraid to surrender the empty forms of their life.

However, what is gained from the path of poverty and giving up familiar habits that make us feel comfortable is the very essence of comfort and completeness itself. The spiritual current fills everything in life with beingness, as if it breathed completeness into the forms of the world. Everything suddenly is possessed with light.

> *This whole world is the prisoner of destiny, and destiny is*
> *the prisoner of beauty. Beauty reveals, it does not conceal.*

# Forty-Three

OUR FRIEND, Saif al-Bukhari has gone to Egypt. Everyone longs for a mirror and is in love with the reflections of their own inner attributes and attainments. But our friend is missing the true nature of his face. He thinks this bodily appearance is his face, and reflections of this shell are the mirror of his face. Uncover your face, so you can know for certain that I am a mirror of Soul.

Someone says: "I know for a fact that the prophets and saints are all victims of a false presumption. There is nothing to it but mere pretense."

Rumi says: Do you say this by chance, or have you looked into this before speaking?

If you've studied this carefully, then this pretension you describe is itself a vision of discovery.

Indeed, to possess knowingness is the most precious and noblest thing in existence. The only proof of the prophets' message is their own claim to such a vision, as you are acknowledging for yourself. Such awareness comes into being only through longing and seeking. It requires belief that there is such a thing as Truth, and it needs desire to find it. Your own statement describes this same story of a seeker: the desire for Truth and vision attained. Thus, the relationship between God and humanity is a strange case where all negation only proves the positive.

They say, "Those people are disciples of a dimwit and venerate the fool." I say, "That 'dimwit' of a Sheikh is no less than a stone or an idol." Those who worship stones venerate and magnify them. They direct their hopes and longings toward them, and their prayers, needs, and tears. The stone knows nothing, nor can it feel anything of this. Yet God has made stones and idols their means for devotion, of which the stones and idols are totally unaware.

In the same way, these disciples are in love with the image of this foolish Sheikh, and the Sheikh is oblivious to their "banishment," "union," and all the phases of their love life.

If misguided and misdirected love for a phantom can produce ecstasy, still this is nothing like the mutual love enjoyed with a real beloved who is aware and fully responding to the lover's condition. People who embrace a pillar in the dark, thinking it is their beloved, the pleasure they enjoy cannot compare with one who embraces their living and conscious lover.

## COMMENTARY

There are indeed many who get caught up in their own delusions of grandeur, thinking they have gained wisdom, and there are thousands who follow them. But this does not disprove the reality of spiritual awareness. It reinforces it, by confirming the fact that the search for real wisdom is only gained after extraordinary effort and experience. Not everyone gains this.

True, much of what people describe as love for a teacher comes from their own projections. They magnify onto others what they can't see in themselves. This is the mirror that Rumi is talking about when he says that people look up to others to find a reflection of their own inner nature.

This worship of mirrors is like the man who grasps a pillar in the dark, thinking it is his beloved. However, this is nothing like the real love that passes between a conscious inner teacher and an awakened student. Such a mutual exchange never goes the way anyone expects, because it is not a projection, but the joining of one consciousness with another. The experience of an inner teacher, who knows our subtle states and responds to us, is like the embrace of a real lover. It opens doors beyond anything we imagine, because it is a living interaction that takes place with a consciousness outside of our own and comes from beyond this world.

# Forty-Four

EVERYONE SETTING OUT on a journey has a goal: "Once I arrive I will gain advantages and improve my affairs. My business will be set in order, my friends will be delighted, and I shall defeat my enemies." Such are the ideas we have in mind, but God's purpose is something else. We make so many plans and conceive so many ideas, yet not one turns out according to our desire. Still, even with all of that, we continue to rely on our aims and plans.

*Ignoring fate, people plot their little plans.*
*God's Will does not consult with the schemes of man.*

This is illustrated by a woman who dreams that she has wandered into a strange city where no one knows her and she knows no one else. She becomes bewildered and depressed, saying to herself, "Why did I come to this city where I have not even one friend or acquaintance to shake me by the hand, or press me on the lip?" On awakening, the city and its people vanish, and she realizes that all her agony and sorrow were for nothing. So she forgets the dream world, thinking her worries were wasted. However, the next time she falls asleep, she finds herself in exactly the same kind of city again and begins to feel the same grief and loneliness. She regrets coming to such a place and can't remember that, when awake, she saw how foolish it was to worry, being only a dream.

This is exactly how people are. They have seen their plots come to nothing a hundred thousand times. Life never develops according to their carefully laid plans. But God places a covering over their eyes, so they forget everything that happened and once again begin working on their dreams and desires.

*"God stands between people and their hearts."*

Once, when Ibrahim, son of Adham, was king, he galloped in the track of a deer he was hunting, until he became separated from his soldiers, leaving them far behind. His horse was weary and covered with sweat, but he still chased on. After passing far into the desert wilderness, the deer suddenly stopped, turned back its face and said, "You were not created for this. Beingness was not brought forth from non-being for you to hunt me. Even if you catch me, what will you have accomplished?"

When Ibrahim heard these words, he cried aloud and flung himself from the horse. There was no one in that desert except a shepherd. Ibrahim said to him, "Take my royal robes encrusted with jewels, my arms, and my horse, and give me your coarse clothes. And please tell no one, not even a hint to anyone, what has become of me." He put on the rough garments and set out on his way. Now consider what his intention was and what his true objective turned out to be! He wanted to catch a deer, but God caught him by means of that deer. Therefore, realize that in this world things happen as God wills. His is the design, and all real purpose comes from Him.

Before becoming a Muslim, Umar entered his sister's house. His sister was chanting from the Koran aloud:

*"TA HA: We have not sent down...."*

When she saw her brother she immediately hid the Koran and became silent. Umar bared his sword saying, "Tell me what you were reading and why you hid it, or this very instant I will chop off your head!" His sister feared him, knowing his temper when angry, and in terror for her life she confessed, "I was reading from these words that God revealed to Mohammad."

"Read on, so that I can hear," said Umar, and she recited the whole of the Sura of Ta Ha. Umar became furious and in a rage he waved his sword, saying, "If I killed you this instant, it would be a killing of the defenseless. First, I will go and cut off Mohammad's head. Then I will attend to you."

In his anger, holding a naked sword, Umar set off for the Prophet's mosque. The chieftains of Quraish, seeing him go by, exclaimed, "Wonderful! Umar is after Mohammad. Surely, if anyone can stop this new religion, Umar can." For Umar was a mighty and powerful man. Any army he marched against was defeated. In fact, the Prophet had declared many times, "God, succor my religion by means of Umar or Abu Jahl." For those two were famous in that time for strength and heroism. Afterwards, when Umar became a Muslim, he used to weep and say, "O Messenger of God, woe for me if you had spoken Abu Jahl's name before mine. What would have become of me then? I would have continued in error."

In short, Umar was on his way, with naked sword, making for the Prophet's mosque. Meanwhile Gabriel revealed to Mohammad, "Lo, Messenger of God, Umar is coming to be converted to Islam. Take him to your bosom." Just as Umar entered the door of the mosque, he saw clearly an arrow of light fly from Mohammad and pierce his heart. Umar uttered a loud cry and fell down insensible. Love and passionate desire filled him. He wanted to dissolve himself into Mohammad out of extreme affection, and he became nothing.

He said, "Prophet of God, offer me your faith and speak your blessed word, so I can hear." Having become a Muslim, he said, "Now, to correct my actions of coming against you with a bared sword, and to cleanse that act, henceforth I will give quarter to no one I hear speaking wrongly of you. With this sword I will strike their heads from their bodies."

Coming out of the mosque, he suddenly encountered his father. His father said, "You have changed religion." Immediately he struck off his father's head and walked on, holding the bloodstained sword.

The chieftains of Quraish, seeing the blood, said to Umar, "You promised to bring back Mohammad's head. Where is it?" Umar said, "I carry it with me!" One of them said, "You brought his head?" He answered, "No, not that head. The head I bring is from the other side."

Now, look at what Umar planned and what God brought about from those plans. Know that all affairs turn out as God desires.

Abraham said, "O God, since you have chosen and honored me with the robe of Your approval, also grant this favor to my children." God declared:

*"My covenant shall not reach the evildoers."*

When Abraham realized that God does not extend His loving care to those who harm and disrespect others, he tried to strike a bargain. He said, "O God, those who believe and avoid evil—give them a portion of Your provision." God declared, "My provision is common to all men and women, and everyone shall have a share of it. All creatures enjoy their portion of benefits from this guest-house. But the robe of My approval and the honor of ennoblement and distinction are a special gift for the elect and chosen ones."

> *"We appointed the House to be a place of visitation for*
> *the people, and a sanctuary. Take to yourselves Abraham's*
> *station for a place of prayer."*

The literalists interpret this "House" as the Kaaba, for in the Kaaba it is forbidden to hunt and no cruelty is allowed against anyone. God singled out that House. This is all perfectly true and fine, but that is the literal meaning of the Koran. However, the Sufis say that the "House" is the inner core of our beingness. In other words, "God, free my inward self of temptation and worldly plans. Cleanse it of all passions and idle thoughts, so that no fear can enter in and security prevails. Let it completely become the center of Your revelation."

It is said that God has appointed meteors to watch over heaven to prevent the accursed Satans from listening to the secrets of the angels. The meaning of this according to mystics is, "O God, appoint the guardian of Your loving care to watch over our inward house, to drive away from us the temptation of misguided thoughts and the tricks of carnal desires."

Everyone begins this path from their own place. The Koran is a double-sided brocade. Some enjoy one side, and some the other. Both are valuable, since God wants everyone to gain benefit from it. In the same way, a woman has a husband and a child. Each enjoys her in a different way. The child's pleasure is in her breast and her milk. The husband's pleasure is in intercourse with her. Some people are infants of the Way—they take pleasure in the literal meaning of the Koran and drink that milk. But those who have reached years of full discretion have another enjoyment and a different understanding of the inner meanings of the Koran.

Abraham's station and place of prayer is a certain spot in the Kaaba where the literalists say two inclinations of prayer must be performed. This is excellent indeed, by Allah. But according to the Sufis, Abraham's station is that inward state where you should cast yourself into the fire for God's sake, reaching this place through work and effort in God's name. There, people can sacrifice themselves for the sake of God, their own selves having no place in their sight, and they cease to tremble for themselves. To perform two inclinations of prayer at Abraham's station is excellent, but let the standing be performed in this world, and the bowing be in the other world.

The true Kaaba can be found in the heart of the prophets and the saints. This is the locus of God's revelation. The physical Kaaba is a branch of that. If it were not for their heart, of what use would the Kaaba be? Prophets and saints forsake their own desires to follow the desires of God. Whatever God commands, becomes their own wish. The person who loses the grace of God, even if it were their own mother or father, appears indifferent to the saints.

*Into Your hands we give the reins of our heart.*
*Whatever heart You say is cooked, we testify it is burnt!*

Everything I say is a comparison. Comparison is one thing and equivalence is another. We liken God's Light to a lamp for the sake of comparison, and the saints are likened to the glass of that lamp.

God's illumination cannot be contained by any space or world, so how could a glass lamp contain it? How can the whole of Truth be contained in a heart? Yet seeking, you find it in your heart. Not as if it were a box that holds the Light, but from out of your heart it radiates. It is like finding yourself in a mirror, even though your form doesn't exist in the mirror itself. Still, looking in the mirror, you see yourself.

Through comparison, incomprehensible things can be understood. Once they are intelligible our senses can grasp them.

If someone says they close their eyes and see real and wonderful realities, but once they open their eyes everything disappears—no one would believe them. Without an example, it doesn't seem possible. It sounds as if they are describing a dream where they see a thousand things that could never be seen while awake. However, architects inwardly see and conceive designs of houses, right down to the dimensions and shapes. No one else can see their plans until they are drawn on paper. Then they become visible and intelligible to everyone. From those plans, people build houses. Then they can be felt and touched with our senses.

In the same way, unintelligible things become understandable and make sense to us through comparison. Thus, they say that in the other world books containing that person's actions will fly to the person, some to their right hand and some to their left. There are also angels, the Throne, Heaven and Hell, the Balance, the Reckoning, and the Book of Life. None of these spiritual realities are clear until an analogy is given. There is no likeness in this world for any of these things, yet through comparison they can be understood.

For example, by night people sleep, cobbler and king alike, judge and tailor. Once asleep, their thoughts take wing, and no thought remains to one of them. Then, at dawn, it is as though the blast of Israfil's trumpet brings life to the atoms of their bodies, and the thoughts of each one, like scrolls from the next world, fly headlong towards each person without any mistake—the tailor's thoughts to the tailor, the lawyer's thoughts to the lawyer, the blacksmith's thoughts to the blacksmith, the oppressor's thoughts to the oppressor, the thoughts of the just to the just. Does anyone sleep through the night as a tailor, and rise by day a cobbler? No, for that work belongs to them, and so they take up their occupation as before. From this you can see that the essence of each person continues in the other world. This makes sense, because in this world we see the same thing.

If we continue with comparison until we reach the end of this thread, we will witness all the states of the next world in this world. We will sniff out in this world all the circumstances as they correspond to the other world, and we will see that all things are contained in God's omnipotence. Many are the bones moldering in their graves, yet enjoying the sweet repose and drunken sleep of that enjoyment and intoxication. These are not idle words, for the saying goes, "May the dust lie sweetly on them!" If the dust had no awareness of sweetness, why would anyone say such a thing?

*I pray that moon-faced beauty may live a hundred years,*
*My faithful heart quivering for the shafts of her tears.*
*In the dust of her doorway my happy heart has died,*
*Praying, "Lord, may her dust forever sweetly abide!"*

A couple are sleeping on one mattress. The woman sees herself in the midst of a banquet, a rose garden, and Paradise; the man sees himself in the midst of snakes, the guardians of Hell, and scorpions. If you investigate, you will see neither Paradise nor Hell. Why then should it be a surprise that the parts of some, even in the tomb, experience pleasure, repose, and intoxication, while some are in pain, torment, and agony, yet you can see neither pleasure nor pain? Therefore, the invisible becomes sensible through the use of comparison.

Comparison is one thing, equivalence is another. The Gnostics give the name "spring" to relaxation, happiness, and expansion. They call contraction and sorrow "autumn." What resemblance is there between happiness and spring, sorrow and autumn? Yet without this comparison the intellect cannot conceive and grasp the meaning. So the Koran declares:

> *"Not equal are the blind and those with sight, the shadows and the light, the shade and the torrid heat."*

Here, faith is compared to light and unbelief to shadows, but faith could be related to a delightful shade and unbelief to a burning, merciless sun boiling the brain. What resemblance is there between the bright subtlety of faith and the light of this world, or between the sordid gloom of unbelief and the darkness we know at night?

Do you see this man who fell asleep while we were talking? That slumber is not a sign of heedlessness, but safety and security. Like a caravan traveling along a difficult and dangerous road on a dark night, they drive on in fear, lest harm should befall them. But as soon as the voice of a dog, or cock, reaches their ears and they find a village, they are carefree. They stretch out their legs and sleep sweetly. On the road, where not a sound or murmur would disturb them, they cannot sleep out of fear. But in the village they find security, and even with all the barking of dogs and crowing of cocks, they are happy and fall asleep.

Our words also derive from community and security, they are the sayings of prophets and saints. When Soul hears the words of familiar friends, it feels secure and is delivered from fear, for upon these words is wafted a scent of hope and felicity. Just as travelers on a dark night think every moment that thieves are mingling with their caravan; they long to hear the words of their fellow travelers and to recognize them by their words. Once they hear friends speaking they feel secure. The same is true with you. Because your essence is subtle, glances are not enough for us. But if you speak, we will hear the familiar friend of our spirits and feel secure and at peace. So speak!

A certain mouse inhabiting a cornfield is invisible, being so small. But once it makes a sound, then people know it by means of its sound. People are utterly immersed in the cornfield of this world, and your essence, being extremely subtle, is invisible. So speak, that we may recognize you.

When we long to see a certain place, our heart goes first to experience the conditions there. Then our heart returns and draws our body along. Now all the men and women of this world are like bodies in relation to the saints and the prophets, who are the heart of this world. These beings of the heart first journeyed to the other world, leaving their human attributes of flesh and skin. They surveyed the depths and heights of that world and traversed all the stages, until they knew the way. Then they came back and summoned mankind, saying, "Come to the original world! For this world is a bleak and empty ruin compared to the garden we have discovered."

From this you should realize that the heart is always attached to its beloved and has no need to traverse the stages, no need to fear highwaymen, no need for the mule's packsaddle. It is the helpless body that is tied to these things.

> *I said to my heart, "How is it that you are barred from the service of Him, whose name you bless?" My heart replied, "You misread the signs. I am constantly in His service. You are the one astray."*

Wherever you are, no matter what may happen, always strive to be a lover, a passionate lover. Once love becomes your own you will be a lover eternally, in the grave, at the resurrection, or in Paradise, forever and ever. When you have sown wheat, wheat will surely grow, stocks of wheat will fill the shed, loaves of wheat will fill the oven.

When Majnun wanted to write a letter to Laila, he took a pen in his hand and wrote:

*Your name is on my tongue,*
*Your image is within my sight,*
*Your memory fills my heart,*
*Where, then, can I write?*

Your image dwells in my sight. Your name never leaves my tongue. Your memory occupies the depths of my soul, so where am I to write, seeing that You are here in all these places? The pen broke and the page was torn.

Many are those whose heart is filled by such reality, but they cannot express the words in terms of speech. This is not surprising and is no limit to that love. On the contrary, the root of the matter is the heart, yearning, and passion. A child is in love with milk, and from milk it derives succor and strength. Yet the child cannot explain milk or describe it, saying, "What pleasure I find in drinking milk, and how weak and anguished I would be without it." The child has no words for it, yet still it desires milk. Most grown people, on the other hand, even though they might describe milk in a thousand ways, still they can't find anywhere near the pleasure or delight in milk that they did as children.

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## COMMENTARY

Why do we put so much faith in plans that rarely turn out as we expect? Why do we miss this lesson and go right back to putting so much hope in our goals?

Rumi is saying: Give up your personal schemes and look instead for Life's purpose. Ask: What does Life want? Step back from the petty designs and conspirings of mankind and ask: What is emerging out of the whole, and what is my place in this?

These are questions that lead to listening. This opens us and changes our perceptions. It moves us from an egocentric world, where we try to make everything work the way we think it should, to a living relationship with reality.

> *Wherever you are, no matter what may happen, always*
> *strive to be a lover, a passionate lover.*

He means becoming a lover with Life. A lover that is always listening. A lover exchanging glances and words in a continual conversation with the whole of reality.

Rumi is suggesting to look beyond what others tell us is God's will, or what has been written in holy books, but to find the source itself and become involved with it directly and intimately. Our own will and the ideas of mankind blind us from experiencing the breath of life that vivifies all things.

Whatever succeeds comes into being because it is aligned with the grander purpose. We like to take credit when it works and blame others when it doesn't, but our role is only one part in a long chain that begins and ends beyond the scope of our vision. Sand castles might exist for a day, but they are soon washed away. However, the movement of the ocean continues through the eons.

We are driven by hopes and desires without ever seeing the deeper purpose. There is a hidden reason beneath our reasons. We don't even know ourselves what comes through us. We say and do things that we wish later we hadn't. We prove over and over again that our greatest accomplishments only leave us wanting more. And yet the simplest things bring a sense of fulfillment, as if saying to us: "This is what we are here for. This is what really matters."

You don't often hear people saying that we should obey the will of God, these days, but you do see people preaching that our family should be most important to us, or our relationships, or our country. The list of what people should dedicate themselves to goes on and on.

But sometimes it is not our family that is most important. Sometimes it is not our job or a mission in the world, because these are only fragments of the whole of life that we are a part of. Sometimes Life is simply calling out for us to listen, to awaken to her call and our inner conversation with her. Sometimes it is our place in her Purpose that Soul longs for.

It turns out that our fulfillment and God's fulfillment are aligned. This is one of the most fascinating aspects of God's will. Our moments of complete satisfaction and happiness are signs. Our heart has a map that shows what Life wants.

*Everyone begins this path from their own place.*

# Forty-Five

RUMI ASKS: What is the name of that youth?

Someone says: "Saif al-Din ('Sword of the Faith')."

Rumi says: No one can judge a sword while still in its scabbard. Truly, the Sword of the Faith is one who defends the way, dedicates their efforts wholly to God, reveals rightness from error and distinguishes truth from falsehood. But first they correct themselves and improve their own character: "Begin with yourself," said the Prophet.

They direct all discipline first to themselves, saying, "After all, I, too, am human. I have hands and feet, ears and understanding, eyes and a mouth. The prophets and saints—who attained God's favor and reached their goal—they were also human with reason, a tongue, hands and feet. Why were they shown the way? Why is this door that was opened to them, closed to me?" They correct themselves night and day. They struggle, saying, "What have I done that I have not been accepted?" They continue until they become the Sword of God and the Tongue of Truth.

For example, ten people want to enter a house. Nine find the way, but one remains outside and is not allowed in. Certainly this person reflects inwardly and mourns, saying, "What did I say that they would keep me out? What bad manners am I guilty of?" They attribute the fault to themselves and recognize their own errors and poor behavior. They should never say, "God has done this to me. What can I do? It is God's will. If God willed it, I would be shown a different way." Such words are tantamount to abusing God. Such a person would be a Sword Against God, not the Sword of God.

God is far beyond having family or friends. "He has not begotten and has not been begotten," says the Koran. You cannot say that those who have found the way to God were more God's kin, more His friends, or more closely connected to Him. No one has ever approached God except from below.

*"God is all sufficient. You are the needy ones."*

Nearness to God is never attained, except through devotion and submission. He is the Giver of givers. He fills the skirt of the sea with pearls. He clothes the thorn in the raiment of the rose. He bestows life and spirit upon a handful of dust—all without precedent, all without favorites. All the world receives their share from Him.

When people hear about a generous person who gives away valuable gifts and favors, naturally they want to visit such a benefactor of wealth, in hopes of receiving a share of that bounty. Since God's Grace is so well known to the entire world, why don't you beg of Him? Why don't you ask Him for robes of honor or a rich gift? Instead, you sit in indolence saying, "If He wants, He will give to me." So you never ask Him for anything.

A dog, without reason or comprehension, when hungry, comes up to you and wags its tail as if to say, "Give me food. I am hungry by the sight of that food you have. Please give me some." A dog knows that much. Are you less than a dog? The dog is not content to sleep in ashes and say, "If he wants to he will throw me some food," but begs and wags its tail. You should wag your tail and beg of God as well, for in the presence of such a Giver, to ask is the expression of love. If you lack good fortune, ask from One who gives willingly and commands limitless wealth.

God is always near to you. Every thought and idea you conceive, there is God—for God gave beingness to that idea and thought. God is so close you cannot see Him. What is so strange in that? In every act you perform, reason guides you and initiates your action, but you cannot see your reason. You see its effect, but you cannot see its essence. For instance someone goes to the baths. Wherever they go in the baths they feel the heat of the fire, even though they cannot see the fire itself. When they leave the baths, then they see the actual fire and flames. From this they know that the heat of the baths comes from a fire.

The human being is also a huge bath, and within itself dwells the heat of reason, spirit, and the lower self. But once you leave this bath and enter the other world, you see the actual essences. Then you know that intelligence comes through the glow of reason, that fallacies and pretenses radiate from the lower self, and the impulse of life itself is the result of spirit. You can clearly see the essences of all three, but as long as you are in the bath they are invisible. You can only experience their effect.

When we were in Samarkand, the Khvarizmshah laid siege to Samarkand and attacked with his army. Not far from us lived an exceedingly beautiful girl, so lovely that none could match her in all the city. I heard her saying, "O God, I know You would never allow me to be delivered into the hands of evildoers. I know You would never permit that. I rely on You, O God."

When the city was sacked and all its inhabitants were taken into captivity, even the maidservants of that woman were captured. But she was left unharmed. For all her extreme beauty, no man even cast eyes on her. From this, know that whoever commits themselves to God is secure from harm and remains in safety. No petition of man in God's presence is ever ignored. Therefore beg of God, and demand what you need of God, for your petition will not be in vain.

*"Call upon Me and I will answer you."*

A certain dervish taught his son that no matter what he needed, "Ask it of God." The years passed. Then one day, while the child was alone in the house, he became hungry. In his usual way he said, "I want some food, I am hungry." Suddenly a bowl of pottage materialized, and the child ate until he was full. When his father and mother returned, they said, "Aren't you hungry?" The child answered, "I just asked for food and ate." His father said, "Praise be to God, that your confidence and reliance upon God has grown so strong!"

When Mary was born, her mother vowed to dedicate Mary to the House of God and not to support her. She left Mary in the Temple. Zachariah demanded to care for the child, but everyone wanted to do so, as well. A dispute sprang up amongst them. Now in that time the custom was that each party in a dispute would throw a stick on the water—the one whose stick floated longest was deemed to prevail. It so happened that Zachariah's stick was the right one. They all agreed that he had the right to care for Mary.

So, every day Zachariah brought food to the child, but he always found an exact match of that food already at her side. He said, "Mary, I am in charge of you. Where is this food coming from?" Mary said, "Whenever I feel the need for food, I ask God and He sends it. His bounty and compassion are infinite. Whoever relies on Him, their trust is not in vain."

Now, after Zachariah saw this he prayed, "O God, since You allow the need of this child, please grant me my desire. Give me a son who will be Your friend, who, without my prompting, will walk with You and be occupied in obedience to You." God brought John into being, even though his father was bent and feeble, and his mother was very old and had not borne a single child while she was young. Still, she became pregnant and gave birth.

Don't you see that all these things are but an occasion for the display of God's omnipotence? Everything comes from Him, and His will comes to pass in every moment.

Believers know that behind this wall there is Someone who is aware of each and every circumstance of our lives, and He sees us though we do not see Him. But those who say, "No, this is all a tale," they cannot believe. One day they will realize their error, and then what has been hidden to them will become visible.

For instance, you are playing a rebec. Even if you cannot see anyone, as long as you know people are behind this wall listening, you will continue playing, for you are a rebec player. In the same way, the purpose of prayer is not standing, bowing, and prostrating all day, since those moments of spiritual union that possess you in prayer should always be with you. Whether asleep or awake, writing or reading, in any moment, you should not be far from the remembrance of God.

Speaking and keeping silent, sleeping and eating, being enraged and forgiving—all these attributes should be like the turning of a water mill. Surely the mill revolves because of water, and it knows this, since it has tried to move without water. Any mill that believes it is the source of its own turning is the epitome of foolishness and ignorance.

Now this revolving occurs within a narrow space, for that is the nature of this material world. Therefore, say to God, "O God, grant me another turning that is spiritual, since all needs are fulfilled by You." Therefore, bring your needs to Him constantly, and never be without His remembrance, for the remembrance of God is strength, feathers, and wings to a bird of spirit.

Through remembrance of God, little by little, the inward heart becomes illumined and detached from the outward world. Just as a bird that tries flying to heaven, even though it never reaches that goal, yet every moment it rises farther from the earth and out-soars the other birds. Or, for instance, some musk is in a jar, but the mouth of that jar is too small, and when you reach in you cannot remove the musk. Still, your hand is perfumed and your nostrils are fulfilled. So it is with the remembrance of God: although in this moment you do not attain the Essence of God, still it leaves its mark on you, and you gain the benefits that go with that mark.

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## COMMENTARY

What does it mean to be a sword of the faith? In other words, Rumi is asking: What is the nature of a spiritual person?

They begin first with themselves and they end with themselves. They continue to ask and listen for what it takes to become worthy of divine grace. They catch a scent of illumination from an experience or through the presence of a person who radiates truth. To meet someone, such as Rumi, is to feel the reality of this permeating their being and filling the room.

What must we do to gain the state where these lovers of God live? Moment by moment we must ask this very question. Asking brings us closer.

*No one has ever approached God except from below.*

We should not be afraid to beg of God to lead us and show us the way. This inward pleading unlocks the door. It opens us and changes us.

Rumi recites tales from the Koran about Zachariah and Mary, along with stories about the beautiful girl of Samarkand and the hungry child. In Rumi's day, people accepted these accounts without questioning whether they were true. Today, however, we see these as myths and fables.

Rumi would not have minded this in the least, nor would it have changed his point. If he were talking in modern times, he would have referred, instead, to recent news reports, such as the child lost in the woods that was found safe weeks later, after being kept warm by wolves. Or, the storm that washed away a whole village, yet left one home standing untouched. Or great acts of heroism during an earthquake, when strangers came together to find and save a woman buried for over a week. Or, the mysterious way that thousands of animals avoided death from a Tsunami by instinctively fleeing to high ground as if they knew what was about to happen, while people even with the latest technologies had no warning. These were all real events.

Miracles are no less common these days than in Rumi's time. The normal order of life becomes altered for a moment, revealing an unexpected expression of life. What is different today is that we are not as open to religious answers. We would rather reach for scientific explanations, whether they are true or not. It is not hard to find cases where people will laugh at a person grasping for a religious explanation. Yet, those same people turn right around and resort to scientific conjectures without any evidence to support them, and think this is perfectly fine. This is just the cultural bent of our times.

None of this changes Rumi's message. The fundamental experience is the same now as it has always been.

> *God is always near to you. Every thought and idea you conceive, there is God—for God gave beingness to that idea and thought. God is so close you cannot see It.*

Study closely and carefully that moment of recognition when understanding dawns and you will see this inner event as if a light turned on. This moment of illumination comes with every thought and idea you conceive. And the way of gaining this realization is the same as it has always been:

> *But once you leave this bath and enter the other world, you see the actual essences. Then you know that intelligence comes through the glow of reason, that fallacies and pretenses radiate from the lower self, and the impulse of life itself is the result of spirit.*

Once our awareness moves beyond the human state of consciousness, the working of Spirit becomes visible. We do not have to wait for death to experience this. One moment in such an expanded state wipes away years of logical reasoning and conjectures. Never think that Rumi is encouraging blind belief, which is the inclination of the lower self, as he says above. He is describing the dimensions and principles of the impulse of Spirit from personal experiences with it.

This is what changes our life and the world around us. Just as wild animals sense fear, so they also respond to confidence and knowingness. When inner authority comes from the depths of truth, it moves people and all things, even lifeless matter. Those who live from such a center find their needs taken care of, even when the situation seems hopeless. The more they understand the spiritual reality behind all things, the more their fears and worries disappear.

> *Through remembrance of God, little by little, the inward heart becomes illumined and detached from the outward world.*

In other words, with this discourse Rumi is answering the question: What is the nature of spiritual men and women?

# Forty-Six

SHEIKH IBRAHIM is a noble dervish. When we see him, we are reminded of our beloved friends. Our Master Shams used to refer to him as "our Sheikh Ibrahim," showing his affection.

Divine favor is one thing, but personal effort is another. The prophets did not attain prophethood by their own efforts—they gained that fortune through Divine grace. Yet God still required them to live lives of personal effort and virtue. This was for the sake of the common people, so they could put reliance on the prophets and their words. The gaze of ordinary people cannot penetrate into the inward heart—they see only the outward show. Yet, following those externals, through the Divine blessings bestowed on those forms, people find the way to the internal.

After all, even Pharaoh made personal displays of charity and noble acts, but since God's favor was not present, his generosity and beneficence remained hidden. Like a military commander who is in charge of a fortress, even when he is kind and generous to the people, if his plan is to throw off allegiance to the king and become a rebel, his kindness loses all worth and luster.

Nevertheless, we should not entirely deny God's favor to Pharaoh. God's grace might have been secret, causing Pharaoh to be rejected for a good purpose. For a king is both vengeful and gracious. He bestows both robes of honor and prison terms. The Sufis do not deny God's favor to Pharaoh completely. The literalists, however, consider Pharaoh wholly rejected, and this is fine for the proper maintenance of the external teaching.

When a king puts a man on the gallows, he hangs him up high in the presence of the assembled people. The king could also suspend him indoors, hidden from everyone, by a low nail, but it is necessary for people to see and take warning. Execution of the king's decrees and the carrying out of his orders should be visible. But not every gallows consists of wood. High rank and worldly fortune are also a gallows, and a very high one. When God desires to chastise someone, He grants them high rank in the world and a great kingdom, like Pharaoh, Nimrod, and the rest. All those eminent positions are like the gallows from which God hangs people for others to gaze upon and understand.

For God declares, "I was a hidden treasure, and I desired to be known." This is to say, "I created all the world to manifest My Reality, now through graciousness, now through severity." God is not the kind of king for whom one voice is sufficient. If every atom in the world became God's herald, they would still be unable to properly proclaim His Truth.

Therefore, day and night people are forever revealing God, but while some understand this, others are unaware. In either case, the manifestation of God's will is certain. For example, a prince orders a man to be beaten, and the man screams and shouts with pain. Still, everyone sees that both beater and beaten are revealing the prince's authority.

Whoever acknowledges God is revealing God continually, and whoever denies God is also revealing God. For how can anything be demonstrated without its opposites? Besides, it would be wholly without pleasure and enjoyment. Thus, someone who loves controversy proposes big changes at a meeting, but if there is no reaction or argument, what can he say in return, and what joy is there in that? For proclamations are only meaningful in the face of negation. In the same way, this world is a declaration for God. Without a proposer and an opposer this assertion would be pale and lifeless.

*"The believers are like a single soul."*

Dervishes are joined as if by a single body. If one member feels pain, all the others are distressed. An eye gives up its seeing, the ear its hearing, the tongue its speech—all meet in that one body. True friendship is to sacrifice oneself for one's friend. To plunge into danger for our friend's sake. For all are headed towards one and the same goal. All are drowned in one and the same sea. This is the effect of faith and submission to God. What is the load they carry with their bodies compared to the load they carry with their souls?

Once the believer surrenders to God, why should they give a thought to distress and danger, to hands and feet? If their journey is to God, what use do they have for limbs? God gave you hands and feet to travel in this world, but when traveling to that One who makes hands and feet, what does it matter if you trip and stumble, or like Pharaoh's sorcerers go crawling on your belly? What cause for grief is that?

*Poison is good to sup*
*When the fair one fills the cup.*
*Bitter words are sweet to hear*
*When the speaker is most dear.*
*Full of pleasure is my love*
*With that salty wit I know of.*
*Very pleasing is its smart*
*Rubbed into my wounded heart.*

And God knows best.

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## COMMENTARY

Sheikh Ibrahim was a beloved student of Shams-i-Tabriz. Seeing Ibrahim, Rumi is reminded of Shams. In the same way, there are people in this world that remind us of God because of their closeness to Truth.

Closeness to God is one thing, but personal efforts are another. Those who gain divine favor do not receive this because of something they do. Divine Grace, the current of inner light and sound, comes secretly and inwardly from the Heart of Life and lifts them. Their responsiveness to It awakens them, but all credit belongs to God. This is not something they earn as a reward for doing good things, because it is something internal that is wholly from and belonging to God.

However, personal efforts still matter. To continue entering those states of consciousness filled with Grace, we must become a vehicle for Spirit in this world. If we wish to bathe in that Presence, we must also let it flow through us. This is the responsibility for lovers of Truth. Their need for spiritual work comes from their closeness to God. They feel compelled to express these gifts they receive with all of life in order to continue growing in awareness and to merge deeper into God.

Few people can recognize who is spiritually advanced by seeing into their hearts. They may not witness the river of Spirit flowing through Soul, but they can see devotion and humility, and this reminds them of God. For this reason, acts of virtue are also important and we should not forget them. Our outer actions and care that we show others will also help awaken in them the search for greater truth. Even the smallest acts matter.

On the other hand, no one should be fooled by outer appearances. Acts of religious display and positions of success and prominence are not indicators of God's favor. They hardly matter at all. Never judge the spiritual attainment of others by outer means. Think of your own brothers and sisters on the path whose lives are rejected and looked down upon by others—and yet their lives are filled with the presence of God. Who can be more fortunate than that? Their public failures become hidden treasures awakening them to what is most important.

> *When God desires to chastise someone, He grants them high rank in the world and a great kingdom. . . .*

There is no need to run from embarrassment or seek success. The secret blessings of true Grace are always present in our lives, wherever we might be.

All things and all people are revealing Truth. There is no one outside of God's favor. Even the worst examples of the human race show us what not to become. So, they, too, are teaching us. They just do not realize what they are proving.

We are tied to our brothers and sisters on the path as if we were one body. Their pains and struggles touch us. We are not separate. Without a word spoken, our inner thoughts and feelings are felt by them, because we are bound together by a common link. Since we are connected, we find our own growth when we care for them and sacrifice for them. This, too, is a part of our spiritual work.

Our personal efforts reach out and awaken others, and their acceptance and recognition awakens us. We then find that we want nothing more than to meet and see such friends, even if we have never met them before, since being with them reminds us of God.

# Forty-Seven

GOD IS THE CREATOR of both good and evil, but blessings come only from what is good. Spiritual law commands and prohibits, but what does it mean to command unless it is at odds with our base desires? If someone forcefully says, “Hungry one, eat these sweet desserts,” that is not a commandment, but a gift. Prohibition works the same way. No one says, “Don’t eat stones, don’t eat thorns,” because there is no need to prevent a thing unless there is a desire for it.

Therefore, laws that forbid evil help people because there exists within human beings a desire for evil. And to bring men and women into existence who desire evil is to create evil. But God does not approve of evil; otherwise, He would not have blessed the good.

This is like those who love to educate others—a part of them is pleased that their students are ignorant, since otherwise they would have nothing their pupils needed to learn from them. To desire something is to desire the need for that thing. But no teacher approves of their students’ ignorance, or why would they teach?

It is the same with doctors: they are happy that illness exists, since how could they make use of their medical skills unless people were sick? But doctors don’t approve of disease, or they would never treat it. Similarly, bakers want people to be hungry so they can ply their trade and earn a living, but they do not approve of hunger, otherwise they wouldn't make bread.

This is why commanders of armies and soldiers want their king to have an opponent and an enemy. How else can they demonstrate their bravery and love for the king? The king would never call on them without a dangerous foe, having no need. But they don't approve of the king's enemy, or they wouldn't risk their lives to fight.

Therefore, we should honor the existence of all things, including evil desires. God blesses those who are grateful and obedient to His Law. However, we should not approve of evil tendencies, but struggle hard to rise above them. Dedication to God means overcoming the lower desires within us.

From this, we can see that God wills evil in one respect, but does not will it in another.

Our opponents say, "God could never will evil in any way whatsoever." That is impossible. How could the Beloved create a thing and not will the need for that thing? Amongst the desires that God has created is this headstrong nature in humanity that longs to believe such foolishness, leading people away from truth.

The lessons for such stubborn people will come to them from the evils of this material world. They will ask how such things could happen. Didn't God will those evils? However, if God approved those evils, He would not have established the blessings and rewards delivered to those who rise above them. This proves that evil exists for the sake of something greater.

Still, they say, "God wills only good, including such good things as abstaining from evil. Therefore, God desires only the avoidance of evil." But evil cannot be averted unless evil exists. Or they say, "God wills only faith," but faith cannot exist except with disbelief, so doubt is a prerequisite to faith. Therefore, willing evil is only bad when it is willed for its own sake. When evil is willed for the sake of a higher purpose, then it is good.

In the Koran it says, "In retaliation there is life for you." Now, obviously retaliation is bad, being an attack against God's creation. But it is only partially evil, while guarding against future killing is a greater good. To do something partly negative for the benefit of everyone is not bad, but to abandon God's will even slightly, while allowing evil to succeed, is wrong indeed. This is like a mother who cannot bring herself to scold her child because of the partial harm of punishment, but the father knows he must punish the child to prevent bad habits from taking hold, and to nip trouble in the bud.

God is All-Pardoning, All-Forgiving, and Terrible in retribution. Does He will that all these names should be true of Him? The answer must be "yes," because He cannot be All-Pardoning and All-Forgiving without the existence of transgression. Thus, He commands us to be forgiving and to make peace, but this commandment has no meaning without the existence of anger and war.

This is similar to Sadr al-Islam's statement that we are commanded to earn and acquire wealth, because in the Koran it says, "And expend in the way of God." Since it is impossible to spend unless one has money, then this is also a commandment to acquire money. It is the same when a man calls out, "Arise and pray." This is a charge to perform the ritual cleaning with water, and all the functions that precede prayer as well.

## COMMENTARY

Unlike almost all of the other discourses which were written in Persian by one of Rumi's students, this one was recorded in Arabic. I have the sense that whoever put these words on paper understood the ideas Rumi was discussing, but missed a large part of what he was trying to say.

We should be thankful that so much of Rumi's subtlety has survived to our day, since understanding the depths of his teaching is rare. What can a person pass on but the parts they comprehend? If you cannot perceive something, how can you describe it or capture it in words? We are fortunate to have these traces left to us, but we should not forget that there is much more that was left behind. Only direct inner connection to the source of Rumi's teaching brings us the whole meaning, as Rumi says over and over.

In this discourse we see Rumi explaining how good and evil exist because God created both. In his day, and even today, there are many who argue against this, not wanting to accept the idea that God could create anything evil. But the reason this subject is so important is because it shows us the underlying value of evil.

How often is pain the thing that drives us to learn? If we received everything we ever wanted, would we ever change? Aren't failures the events that spur us on to try again to get something right? Aren't troubles often the inspiration for finding something better? Life in this world is like a school, and the most difficult experiences often bring us our greatest growth.

The whole idea that our world is caught in a battle between good and evil leads people away from seeing the Truth. It can be used as a justification to attack others and to declare who is wrong, but Life's plan will never be realized this way. In fact, some of the worst crimes against humanity have occurred under the name of driving evil from this world. Trying to destroy evil, they end up creating it.

This proves that they have yet to recognize God's hand behind the terrible things that happen. They cannot see its full value through God's eyes. What we see as evil is only partially true. It is only bad in comparison to what is good. It is only wrong in contrast with something better. The fact that we can see the difference shows us the polarity. To discriminate and recognize the difference between positive and negative is what matters, and we learn from experience that working for the good of all life is the path that leads to happiness and understanding.

However, what is right and wrong changes. What is best for one situation does not work in every case. This is the law of reality, and it is foolish to imagine life any different than this. What is True and Right is inscribed in our inmost being. Our heart sees and knows. Outer teachings can only remind us of this. Laws can't discriminate, only people can.

Polarity brings growth. Suffering can be our greatest teacher. Sometimes we learn from seeing the benefits of doing something right. Both positive and negative are valuable instructors. Who can argue this? This means that both good and evil bring about a greater good. They lead to something beyond opposites, which shows us the way to what is complete and limitless.

Rumi is not saying that God's commandment is to follow the mere words of the Koran or any other holy book. It is the ability to see Truth and to recognize it directly. How do we know when we get it right? Because of the blessings we receive. People say that holy books represent God's words—but this is only true if they lead us to God. The underlying principle of life transforms our awareness through direct and personal events until we can see and know the greater purpose. It is not belief in a doctrine that saves us; it is the awareness that comes through spiritual experience.

In other words, what makes something good is whatever leads us closer to God, and what makes something bad is the suffering we experience from wandering farther away. What is true and right in each moment and every situation varies, but the importance of God's presence is eternal. Whether we realize it or not, this is the path life is teaching us, and there is a deep and enduring happiness that comes from this realization, since it reveals the true design and purpose of creation.

Some events seem so bad that people cannot imagine anything good could come from them. This reflects their lack of understanding. They cannot see the limitlessness of God's goodness. Their human consciousness cannot encompass the fullness and the perfection. They suffer in doubt and confusion until they see the greater reality.

This might lead to disillusionment, sending people away from God, or anything resembling God, into a life without purpose. It can take them away from the source of happiness they once knew, until one day sooner or later it dawns on them. Their own suffering shows them that they are heading in the wrong direction. Once this sinks in, it becomes a lesson that reaches deep into the core of their being. Their consciousness expands, and they become able to recognize the hidden benefits. That is when they see that God has created all of this—both good and bad—for our sake. No written words can capture how completely this realization transforms us.

Life stretches us, challenges us, and expands our awareness.

And this is good.

# Forty-Eight

WHEN GOD LOVES PEOPLE He afflicts them. If they endure with fortitude, He chooses them. If they are grateful, He elects them.

Some men and women are grateful to God for His wrathfulness and some for His graciousness. Both are good. Gratitude is the antidote for all occasions, changing wrath into grace. The wise and devoted servant is grateful for harsh treatment, both publicly and in private, for with the voice of gratitude comes the inspiration to give more. Even if God sends them to the lowest reaches of hell, with gratitude God's purpose is advanced.

Outward complaining is a reflection of inward criticism of God. Mohammad said, "I laugh as I slay." That means, "My laughter in the face of attackers slays their anger and hatred." Laughter, here, is gratitude in place of complaining.

The story is told of a certain Jew who lived next door to one of Mohammad's Companions. This Jew lived in an upper room, from which all kinds of dirt and filth, the piddle of his children, the water his clothes were washed in, fell into the Muslim's apartment below. Yet the Muslim always thanked the Jew and instructed his family to do the same.

For eight years this continued, until the Muslim died. Then the Jew, while visiting the Muslim's apartment, to console the family, saw all the filth coming from his upper room. He realized what had been happening over the years and was filled with sorrow. He said to the Muslim's household, "Why on earth didn't you tell me? Why did you always thank me?" They replied, "Our father taught us to always be grateful, and chided us if we ever complained." After this, the Jew became a believer in Islam.

*Examples of honorable women and men*
*Arouse the growth of virtues within,*
*Like a melodious minstrel's rhyme*
*Inspires the passing of wine.*

For this reason, God, who is All-Powerful and All-Forgiving, thanked His prophets and servants for what they did for Him. Now, gratitude for receiving milk to drink is a blessing, but gratitude from the milk-giver for those who suck the breast is a Divine gift. Although the breast is full, until you suck it the milk will not flow.

Someone asks: "What is it that prevents gratitude?"

Rumi answers: Inordinate greed, for no matter how much people have, greed wants more. They get less than their heart desires, so they cannot be grateful. But they are unaware of their own defect. They cannot see the flaw that taints every coin they offer.

Greed is like eating raw meat—inevitably it makes you sick. Once we realize we have eaten something rotten, a purge is necessary. God, in His wisdom, makes us suffer through ingratitude to purge and rid us of that corrupt conceit, lest that one sickness becomes a hundred sicknesses.

> *"And we tried them with good things and evil, that gratefully they would return."*

That is to say, "We planned for people in ways they do not know, such as their inability to see secondary causes as partners with God."

It is for this reason that Abu Yazid said, "Lord, I have never associated anything else with You." God said, "O Abu Yazid, not even on the night of the milk? You said one night, 'This milk has done me harm.' It is I who create all harm and benefit."

Abu Yazid had seen the secondary causes as separate from God, so God showed him up as a believer in multiple causes and said, "It is I who harmed you, after the milk and before the milk. I made that milk so you would complain, and I made that harm as a correction to teach you, like a teacher's punishment."

When a teacher says, "Don't eat the fruit," if the students eat it, and the teacher beats them on the soles of their feet, it is not right for the pupils to say, "We ate the fruit and it hurt our feet." In the same way, whoever refuses to acknowledge that all things are partners with God, God uses ingratitude to cleanse their spirit from the weeds of believing in many causes. A little with God is much.

The difference between offering praise and giving thanks is that thanks are given for benefits we receive. No one says, "I give thanks for that person's beauty and bravery." Praise-giving is less personal.

## COMMENTARY

God afflicts those It loves.

It shines Its light on those who accept troubles and endure.

It brings into Its presence those grateful for whatever comes to them.

This is not what most people expect. They think the spiritual path should be peaceful and filled with bliss. But those who face the most difficult experiences become the greatest spiritual examples in our world.

Among many American Indian tribes, the medicine men and women were called the wounded ones, because their battles with illness and physical troubles gave them insights into the spiritual meaning behind such trials. Through their own suffering, they came to see pain as a doorway to the spiritual path. This, then, showed them how to help others heal.

There is an inner hardness that breaks and gives way when a person finally surrenders and accepts reality. This often comes only after facing serious problems in life. Rather than trying to fight what IS, there is an instant when acceptance arrives. It might seem like ice that suddenly thaws after a thousand lifetimes. When it melts, the person is finally freed of ego and the desire that has driven them like a taskmaster.

We become so blinded by what we want that we miss the greater gift being given to us each moment. Many think that submission means giving up and is a sign of failure, but God is not looking for us to give up from a position of weakness. It elects those who surrender from a position of strength.

This is the miracle that gratitude brings.

Choosing thanks in every situation, and searching for the hidden benefits of what IS, comes from the knowingness that whatever exists is the best for all of Life. This isn't just a hope, but something we can eventually see. Everything becomes lit by an inner light, and we feel the humming vibration of God all around. It is palpable.

How can we not surrender to such Divine blessings? How can we not realize the gold buried beneath what appears to be even the worst events, once we see God's light and sound in the field of play?

This is not giving up under a weight of sorrows and pain. This is letting go of personal worries about our wants and desires, because we are witnessing the reality of all Life.

> *"We planned for people in ways they do not know, such as their inability to see secondary causes as partners with God."*

This is the exercise and practice Rumi is recommending: Give thanks even during the worst of times.

With gratefulness we can find the single cause behind all events.

# Forty-Nine

RUMI SAYS: A man was leading the prayers and chanted from the Koran:

> *"The Bedouins are stubborn in unbelief and hypocrisy."*

By chance a Bedouin chieftain was present. He gave the chanter a good box on the ears. During the second genuflection, the leader of the prayers chanted a different quote from the Koran:

> *"Some of the Bedouins believe in God and the Last Day."*

The Bedouin exclaimed, "Ha! That slap taught you better manners!"

Every moment we receive a slap from the unseen world. Whatever our plans—one slap and we change our course.

As the saying goes, "We have no power of our own. It is all a swallowing up and a vomiting." The meaning of "swallowing" is descending into this lower world and becoming a part of it. The meaning of "vomiting" is expelling falsehood out of the heart. For instance, if people eat food that turns sour in their stomach, they throw it up. If they do not cast out that poison, it will become a part of them.

Disciples dance and serve to win a place in the heart of the sheik, their teacher. Anything a disciple does that displeases the sheik is cast out from the sheik's heart, like the food we eat and vomit. Just as bad food would become part of us unless we rejected it, so the disciple's poor conduct in time would become a part of the sheik, unless the sheik cast such actions out.

*God proclaimed His love to the world,*
*And every heart was flung into confusion.*
*Their hearts were burned to cinders.*
*Then, into the disinterested wind their ashes were hurled.*

The atoms of their hearts are dancing and singing in that wind of detachment. If not, then why do we hear their songs everywhere and see their tales speaking forth every moment? If their hearts don't realize that their very life consists in burning up and being cast to the wind, why are they so eager to be roasted?

As for those hearts ablaze in the fire of worldly lusts, reduced to ashes, do you hear any sound or see any luster from them?

The poet Urwa ibn Adhina wrote, "I know well that God provides our daily bread. What use is there in running here and there with no purpose? Truly, when I forget money, food, clothing, and the desires of lust, my daily portion comes to me. But when I run after those desires, they only bring me pain and wear me out. If I sit where I belong, with patience, my needs are fulfilled without pain and distress. For, my daily supply is also seeking me and tugging at me. When it cannot draw me towards it, it comes to me; just as when I cannot attract it, I go after it."

The upshot is this: Merge with the world to come, so that world will come to you every moment. "Sitting" means to sit detached from this world while absorbing yourself in the affairs of the world to come. Those who run for the sake of the other world are truly seated. If they are sitting for the sake of this material world, they are running.

The Prophet said, "Whoever reduces all their cares to a single care, God fulfills all their needs." If someone is plagued by ten problems, let them worry about only the one care for the other world, and God will untangle those other nine knots without any effort.

The prophets cared nothing about fame and daily bread. Their only care was God's approval, and yet they received both daily bread and fame. Whoever seeks God's pleasure becomes bedfellows with the prophets in this world and the next.

*"They are with those whom God has blessed: prophets,*
*people of the path, and heaven's guests."*

"I sit with those who remember Me." If God was not sitting with them, the yearning for God would never have entered their hearts. The scent of the rose cannot exist without the rose. The scent of musk never exists without the musk. There is no end to these words. Even if they do end, still they are not like other words.

*The night is departed.*
*Still, my friend,*
*Our story has not yet reached an end.*

The night and darkness of this world passes away, while the light of these words only becomes clearer. Even though the night of the prophets' lives has set, still the light of their teachings has not left, nor ended, nor ever will.

People said about Majnun, "He loves Laila, what is so strange in that? After all, they were children together and went to the same school." Majnun said, "Fools. What pretty woman is not desirable?"

Is there any man whose heart is not stirred by a lovely woman? It is love that feeds our heart, just as the sight of mother, father, and brother, the pleasure of children, the pleasure of lust—all forms of delight are rooted in love. Majnun's story has become an example of all lovers; just as, when teaching grammar, other sentences are quoted.

*Feast on sweetmeats or on roast,*
*Drink the wine that you love most.*

*What's that savor on your lips?*
*Water that a dreamer sips!*
*When tomorrow you arise,*
*And great thirst within you cries,*
*Little use will be that deep*
*Drink you swallowed while asleep.*

The delights of this world are the same as people eating in their sleep. They chase after worldly desires as if looking for something in a dream. Even if they find it, once awake what good will it do if they have eaten while asleep? Still, what they ask for in their dreams they are given, for "The present is proportionate to the request."

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## COMMENTARY

When we receive a slap, we change. We listen and adjust what we are doing, knowing we will be slapped harder the next time.

This is the silent dialogue we have with life. It is as if a spiritual teacher were teaching us, moment by moment. We must rid ourselves of certain attitudes or we will be slapped by pain and suffering.

The nature of the material world is this: The more we pursue the things of this world, the more worries we find, and the more our energy is dissipated.

When you try to control everything to get what you want, you suffer. Stop fighting the messages you are getting. Let the lessons from the unseen world scorch you to your bones and burn you to nothing. Let the winds of detachment blow your ashes everywhere. The atoms of your heart will then dance and sing with all things.

Make the spiritual world your one care, throw the rest out, and all your needs will be met.

This is the underlying lesson that the slaps of life are trying to teach us.

# Fifty

A visitor says to Rumi: "We have studied all aspects of the human condition one by one, and not so much as a single hair-tip of human temperament, or people's hot and cold nature, has escaped our notice. Yet, we still have not discovered what aspect of the human being survives death."

Rumi replies: If such knowledge were attainable merely by asking others, there would be no need for the inner effort and work, and no one would put themselves through pain and sacrifice to know. For example, people come to the sea and see nothing but salt water, sharks, and fishes. They say, "Where is this pearl others speak about? Perhaps there is no pearl."

How can the pearl be gained by merely looking at the sea? Even if they measured out the sea, cup by cup, a hundred thousand times, they would never find the pearl. A diver is needed to discover that pearl, and not just any diver, but a diver who is both fortunate and nimble.

Humanity's sciences and arts are like measuring the ocean with a cup. To find the pearl calls for something else. There are people gifted with every skill, with wealth and good looks to boot, yet this vital quality they don't have. There are others who are outwardly a wreck, who have neither good looks nor elegant speech, yet in them is this element that is immortal. By this element we are ennobled and honored and become superior to all other creatures. Leopards, crocodiles, and lions each have their own peculiar skills and abilities, but these qualities will not survive. When a person discovers their essential factor, they attain the secret of their own eternal reality.

The accomplishments of the human race are like jewels on the back of a mirror. The mirror's face has no jewels, it is pure reflection. Whoever has an ugly face eagerly looks for the jewels, since the mirror's face shows every dark secret.

A friend of Joseph returned from a far journey. Joseph asked, "What present have you brought me?" The friend replied, "What exists that you do not possess? What could you need? Since no one alive is more handsome than you, I brought you a mirror so that every moment you can gaze upon your own face."

What is there that God does not possess? What does He need? Therefore, bring before God a heart of pure reflection, so that He may see His own perfection. "God looks not at your form, nor at your deeds, but at your heart."

You find a city with everything you desire: beautiful people, pleasures, all that people crave, and ornaments of every kind—but you find not one generous person. The opposite would be better than this!

That city is the human being. If in us are a hundred thousand talents, but not that essential facet, better if that city were in ruins. But when that vital quality is there, the outward display matters not—our secret heart will be well furnished. In every state our heart is with God, and our outer work does not hinder our inward occupation. In the same way, whether a pregnant woman finds herself at peace or war, sleeping or eating, the child in her womb is still nourished and continues to grow. The human being also carries its secret like that.

> *"We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it, and were afraid; yet humanity carried it. Surely they are sinful and foolish."*

But God does not leave us in sin and foolishness. Out of our physical life come companionship, families, and a thousand close friendships. If this Trust that humanity carries also produces friendship and knowledge, what is so strange in that? What rises from a person after death? Look in their secret heart. Their secret heart is like the root of a tree—although hidden, its influence appears in the leaves and branches. If a branch or two are broken when the root is whole, they will grow again, but if the root is damaged, neither bough nor leaf remains.

A farmer from the country came to visit and stay in the house of a friend in town. The town person offered their country friend halvah, which the guest ate with gusto. The farmer said, "O friend, night and day I eat carrots. Now that I have tasted halvah, the pleasure of eating carrots has disappeared. But where I live I cannot find halvah every day. What am I to do?" Once a farmer has tasted halvah, they yearn for the place where it is made. The town-person carried their heart away. What can they do? They come looking for their heart.

Some people, when they greet you, the smell of smoke comes from their greeting. Some, when they speak, the smell of musk lingers on. Only those with a sensitive nose know the difference. We must test our friends, so that in the end we have no cause for regret.

Here is another of God's rules: "Begin with yourself." If you claim to be humble and serve God, do not accept this claim without testing it. When people wash, first they lift some water to their nose and then they taste it. Simply looking at the water is not enough, for water may have the appearance of purity, but its taste and smell will prove if it is infected. Once the test is done, then they wash their faces.

Whatever you keep hidden in your heart, God manifests in you outwardly. Whatever the root of the tree feeds on in secret, affects the bough and the leaf.

*"Their mark is on their faces."*

The Koran also says:

*"We shall brand them upon the muzzle!"*

If you want no one to see into your thoughts, how will you hide the flush of color from your face?

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## COMMENTARY

Academic and scientific studies cannot find the essence within us that survives death. It takes a different ability to discover that reality.

The ability to recognize such truth is the key defining factor of our lives, but most people avoid looking at life's mirror, because they don't like seeing the void and confusion in their hearts.

They choose, instead, to look at the jewels on the back side of the mirror, which are the sciences, arts, and creations of human effort. They leave the city of their heart in ruins and make no spiritual friends, because they do not explore and develop their own inner worlds.

*But God does not leave us in sin and foolishness.*

One day we meet someone who offers us something we never tasted before that makes all other food insignificant. That friend steals our heart. We can find no satisfaction in anything else once we taste the essential element that we've been missing.

In other words, Rumi is saying to these researchers that they haven't discovered the secret quality that survives death, because they have not yet found it within themselves.

*"Begin with yourself."*

Those who devote time and effort to cultivate the inner life can see in others whether that spiritual quality is awake or asleep. It's impossible to conceal their hearts from those who see.

*How will you hide the flush of color from your face?*

# Fifty-One

RUMI QUOTES A SAYING from Hakim Sanai, a Sufi teacher who influenced him:

*Until you seek, you cannot find.*
*This is true, except for Lovers:*
*How can they search for God, being blind,*
*Until they have discovered?*

The human quest is the search for what has not yet been found. Night and day people seek that. But the quest that begins after we find and attain what we sought, when we discover our true desire, that is a strange pursuit indeed. It is beyond our imagination and comprehension.

The worldly search is always hunting for something new; things that were never experienced before. But this other quest begins only after we have found our self in the Beloved. This is God's search, for God is the Finder, and God is also the Seeker.

O friend, so long as you thirst for what is created in time, you are far from your goal. But, once your aim passes away into God's purpose, and Its Quest becomes more important than your own, only then can you become a seeker for what cannot be seen.

One of Rumi's students says: "There is no way to prove who is a friend of God and who has attained union with God. Neither words, nor deeds, nor miracles, nor anything else can offer proof. Words can be mimicked, with practice. As for deeds and miracles, there are those who can read a person's inmost thoughts and display many wonders through magic."

Rumi asks: Do you believe in anyone or not?

The student answers: "Yes, by Allah. I both believe and love."

Rumi says: Is your belief in that person founded on proof and token? Or did you simply shut your eyes and take up that person?

The student says: "God forbid that my belief would be without proof and token."

Rumi says: Then why do you say there is no proof or token leading to belief? You have contradicted yourself.

Another student says: "Every saint and great mystic has said, 'I enjoy a nearness with God and Divine favor that no one else has known before.'"

Rumi answers: Who made this statement—a saint, or someone else? If a saint, then they knew that all saints have had this belief, so how could a saint believe they are the only receiver of Divine favor? However, if someone other than a saint made this statement, then in truth that one is the friend and elect of God, for God has kept this experience from all the saints but has not hidden it from that one.

The second student tries to support their statement with a parable: "Once there was a king with ten concubines. The concubines said, 'We want to know which of us is dearest to the king.' The king declared, 'Tomorrow this ring shall be in the room of whomever I love best.' Next day the king commanded ten rings to be made identical with that ring, and gave one ring to each maiden."

Rumi says: The question still stands. This story isn't an answer and doesn't resolve anything. The statement, "The king loves me best," was made by one of the ten maidens or by another woman. If one of the ten maidens made this statement, and she knew that each of the maidens had been given a ring just like hers, then how could she feel that she was loved best? However, if this statement was made by another woman who was not one of the king's concubines, then she was truly shown the king's favor and special love.

Another student says: "A true lover must be submissive and abject and long-suffering." And they listed other qualities.

Rumi says: Should the lover be like that whether the beloved wishes it or not? If the lover is this way against the desire of the beloved, then they are no lover but merely following their own desire. If the lover accepts the desire of the beloved, then when their beloved does not want them to be submissive and abject, how could they be submissive and abject? Therefore, the states affecting the lover are unknown, and we can only know how the beloved wishes us to be.

Jesus said, "I wonder at the living creature that can eat another living creature." The literalists say that this refers to people eating the flesh of animals. This is wrong. Why? Because when people eat flesh, it is no longer an animal, it is inanimate. Once the animal is killed, the living spirit is gone from that flesh. The true meaning of this saying is that the Sheikh mysteriously consumes the disciple. I wonder at a process so extraordinary!

Another student asks the following question: "Abraham said to Nimrod, 'My God brings the dead to life and turns the living into the dead.' Nimrod said, 'When I banish people, it is the same as causing them to die, and when I appoint someone to a post it is as if I brought them to life.' Then Abraham gave up this argument, being compelled to yield to Nimrod's point. He then embarked on another line of reasoning, saying, 'My God brings the sun up from the east and sends it down in the west. Do the opposite of that!' Isn't this argument at odds with the other?"

Rumi answers: God forbid that Abraham could have been silenced by Nimrod and left without any answer! The truth is that Abraham used his second statement to show how God brings life out of the womb of the east with every rising sun and sends it back to death when it sets in the west. Abraham's argument was presented with perfect consistency. God creates us anew every moment, bringing something fresh into our inner heart. God's first moment is nothing like His second, and His second moment is nothing like the third. Yet people are unaware, so they do not see this birth and death.

Sultan Mahmud was given a fine horse with an exquisite shape. Next festival day he rode that horse, and all the people sat on their rooftops to see him and enjoy the spectacle. But one drunken fellow wouldn't move from his apartment. By force, they carried him up to the roof, saying, "Come and look at the Sultan's horse!" He said, "I am busy with my own affairs. I don't want to see it." But he could not escape. So he sat there on the edge of the roof, extremely drunk, as the Sultan passed by.

When the drunken fellow saw the Sultan on the horse he cried out, "What do I care about this horse? Why, this very moment if that horse were mine and a minstrel sang even one song, I would give it to him." Hearing this, the Sultan became extremely angry and had the man thrown into prison. A week passed. Then the man sent a message to the Sultan, saying, "What is my crime? What sin did I commit? Let the King of the World state the case so his servant can be informed."

The Sultan ordered the man to be brought into his presence. He said, "You insolent rogue, how could you utter such words? How dare you speak so rudely?" The man answered, "King of the World, it was not I who spoke those words. In that moment a drunken manikin was sitting on the edge of the roof and spoke those words. Today, I am no longer that fool. I am an intelligent and sensible man." The Sultan was delighted by his answer and conferred on him a robe of honor and ordered his release.

Whoever joins us and becomes drunk on this wine, no matter where they go, or whomever they visit, in reality their moments are still spent with us. For the coolness of strangers reminds us of our own friends' gracious company, and mingling with those who do not know this wine, stimulates love and desire for those who do.

This is why people prize other fruits above sugar, saying, "We tasted so much bitterness on this path to attaining sweetness." How can you know the delight of sweetness until you endure the bitter?

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi explains the difference between mankind's approach to searching and the spiritual quest. People only know how to search for things they can see, or ideas or knowledge that their minds can grasp. These are limited, tangible things. But our true selves long for something more, which is why desires continually crop up to find something new.

When it comes to finding the Reality we cannot perceive, it is beyond our power. However, once we find ourselves in the arms of the Beloved, It begins to reveal to us what could not be seen any other way. Each moment It unfolds a reality beyond anything we could have imagined. This is the meaning of true initiation.

It is as if Life begins to speak to us in a language we finally understand, since we have become a part of It, and Its goals have become our goals. This is when we discover that we are the ones who were being hunted, and God is the Finder.

Rumi then responds to a series of questions from different students. The first student asks: How can you ever know for sure who is a true lover of God? People pretend to be things that they are not. How can we know a true teacher, when there is no proof?

Rumi explains that we each receive indications and proofs. That is how we arrive at what to trust and believe. There may be no proof to the outer world, but we each receive tokens within us of what is true. This is what we need to follow. No outer proofs can take the place of conscious discrimination.

The second student questions the statements of mystics who each feel their experience is unique. How could they all be unique when they each have this same feeling?

Rumi points out that it is not their viewpoint but God's perspective that matters. Either they have been given something personal, distinctive, and special or they have not. If it was given just for them, individually, then it is unique. This is the nature of the higher teaching that Rumi is describing—it is always delivered just for Soul. It is always individual and personal. Those who receive it realize how fortunate they are. Spiritual gifts given to the world are something else. Those are blessings that all of life receives.

Rumi then responds to a question about the story between Abraham and Nimrod, pointing out that Abraham was not giving up in his argument against Nimrod but showing that life is being recreated every day and every moment. This is beyond the power of any man.

This brings us back to how Rumi opened this discourse.

Rumi is trying to shed light on realizations beyond the understanding of the mind. He is trying to get his students to shift their consciousness to where they become a part of the continual expression of Life. That is where they will see the creation and re-creation of all Life every moment that only God can reveal. It is a unique gift experienced individually by Soul.

# Fifty-Two

RUMI IS ASKED the meaning of the following lines:

> *When love attains its ultimate goal*
> *Desire turns into dislike.*

Rumi explains: Dislike is a narrow world compared to friendship. This is why people run from hatred to find friendship. But the sphere of friendship is itself narrow next to the source of both friendship and dislike.

Friendship and enmity, unbelief and faith—these are all opposites in the realm of duality. Yet a state exists where there is no duality but only pure unity. When we reach that region we are beyond friendship and dislike. There is no room for two in that world.

When we arrive there, we leave duality behind. The world of freedom we loved and struggled for seems narrow next to that state where no opposites exist. Therefore, we no longer desire it and are unfulfilled by it.

When Mansur al-Hallaj reached his utmost friendship with God, he became his own enemy and sacrificed his life. He said, "I am God," meaning, "I have passed away. God alone remains." This is extreme humility. Your saying, "Thou art God, and I am Your servant," is arrogance, for you have affirmed your own existence and created dualism. To say, "He is God," is still duality, for until "I" exists "He" is impossible. Therefore, it was God alone who said, "I am God," since Mansur had passed away.

The world of imagination is greater than facts and concepts, for all concepts are born from imagination. Yet imagination itself is narrow compared to that realm where imagination came into being. There is a limit to explanations. That reality cannot be made known by words and expressions.

Someone asks: "Then what is the use of expressions and words?"

Rumi answers: Words set you searching. They are not the objects of your quest. If that were the case, there would be no need for all this spiritual struggle and self-sacrifice. Words are like glimpsing something far away. You follow the trail to see it better, but this doesn't mean the path is what you are seeking. Speech is inwardly the same—it excites you to seek the meaning, even though words are never the reality.

The other day someone said, "I have studied many sciences and mastered many ideas, yet I still do not know what essence in the human being exists forever. I have searched, but I have not discovered it."

If such things were knowable through words alone, you would never need to pass away from yourself and suffer such pains. But if you did not endure the struggle of losing your temporary self, how could you ever know that essence which is eternal?

It is like the boy who says, "I have heard about the Kaaba, but no matter how far I look I cannot see it. I will go up to the roof and search from there." When he gets to the roof and stretches out his neck, he still cannot see the Kaaba, so he rejects that any Kaaba exists. To see the Kaaba takes more than that. It isn't possible to see it from one's home.

In the same way, during winter, you hunt for a fur jacket with all your energy, but when summer arrives you fling it away and forget about it. You sought the coat for the warmth. You were in love with warmth. In winter you cannot find warmth and therefore need the medium of the coat, but once the summer sun starts to shine, you fling the fur jacket away.

"When heaven is rent asunder," and "When earth is shaken with a mighty shaking," are references to yourself. They mean that you have experienced the pleasure of being gathered together, but the day is coming when you will experience the pleasure of being torn apart. Then you will behold the expanse of the other world and be delivered from this present narrowness.

For instance, if someone is held down by four nails for a long time, they start to feel comfortable with this condition, and they forget the pleasure of being free. After they escape the four nails, they realize the torment they had been in. Similarly, babies are swaddled when put to rest in a cradle and they are perfectly at ease with their hands being bound. But if a grown person were bundled up in a cradle, it would be torment and prison.

Some feel pleasure when roses bloom and push forth their heads from the bud. Some feel pleasure when the petals of the rose become scattered by the wind and rejoin their origin. Therefore, there are those who want friendship, passion, unbelief, and faith all to dissolve and return to their source. For these walls of form bring narrowness and duality, while the other world is limitless and absolute unity.

These words of themselves have no power. How can they be powerful? They are merely words. In fact, depending on the words alone can lead to weakness. Their only value is when they inspire us to truth. Words are therefore a veil. How can two or three letters strung together create life and excitement?

When people come to visit and you greet them politely and welcome them, they are happy and feel affection. If you receive them with two or three words of abuse, those two or three words can cause anger and pain. Now what connection is there between connecting together a few words and an increase in affection or anger? God appointed these veils so that no one's gaze can fall upon Its beauty and perfection. Weak veils are appropriate for weak eyes.

Bread in reality is not the cause of life, but God made it appear to be the source of nourishment and strength. After all, bread has no human life, so how can it build strength? If it had any life of its own, it would have kept itself alive.

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## COMMENTARY

Mansur al-Hallaj was put to death in 922 AD after he refused to recant his statement: *ana al-haqq*, which means "I am God" or "I am the Truth."

It was considered blasphemy for anyone to say such a thing: No person can be God or should ever be treated as the symbol of God.

Mansur said: "If you cannot recognize God, at least recognize God's signs. I am His sign, I am the Truth, because through Truth I have become Truth."[11]

To Rumi, Mansur's words were the exact opposite of arrogance and blasphemy. They were words of pure grace, spoken from a state of intoxication and spiritual absorption so complete that Mansur lost himself. Therefore, it was as if God was speaking, not Mansur. He gambled his life away as he passed beyond himself.

To the people of his day, this sounded too much like the idea of a person acting as if they were the manifestation of God. And here Rumi brings us right up against the great paradox of the spiritual teacher who becomes a doorway for his students. It is not the personality that is important, but the state of awareness. The teacher who can speak from beyond duality is not speaking from the human consciousness, but speaks from the whole of Life. This is not the sole province of one person, but is the innate awareness of Soul Itself.

One of Rumi's students then asks what is the purpose of words if words cannot describe the full awareness of Soul, but Rumi doesn't change his theme. He simply explains that it is all about passing beyond mere letters and syllables to find the meaning. It is not the words that matter. We must pass beyond our own human form and our own understanding to know the whole.

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[11] *The Tawasin of Mansur al-Hallaj*, translated by Aisha Abd Ar-Rahman At-Tarjumana, Diwan Press, Berkeley and London, 1974, page 46

The words that describe the path are not the goal. They are only doorways that take us into the greater Self.

Rumi gives these examples because he can see that his students are still missing the state of consciousness he is describing, where the "little self" becomes lost in the totality of God. No mentalized understanding can comprehend the experience of it.

This is why Rumi tells the story of the boy who could not see the Kaaba and therefore concluded it did not exist. Unless he leaves his house—meaning his limited consciousness—he will never see the Kaaba.

People have become so accustomed to their constrained human state, bound up tight like the baby swaddled in a blanket, that they do not realize the awareness of limitless freedom that is inborn.

But as Mansur said: If you cannot see God, at least look to those who are the signs of God.

# Fifty-Three

RUMI IS ASKED the meaning of the following lines from his Masnavi:

> *You are that very thought, my brother:*
> *Those bones and nerves are something other.*

Rumi says: You should think about this and study it.

"That very thought" in reality is not about "thought" at all, and if it is, it does not belong to the kind of thought that people usually mean by the term. In using the word "thought" my intention was the "ideal" or "essential element." If you need to put this "ideal" into a more ordinary way so that common people can understand, then say: "The human being is a speaking animal."

"Speech" is thought, whether spoken or not. The rest of the human being is animal. Therefore, it is perfectly true to say people consist of thought, and the rest is "bones and nerves." Speech is like the sun. All people derive warmth and life from the sun. The sun is always there. The entire world is warmed by the sun, yet the sun's rays are not always visible. When thought is expressed through words or signs, be it thanks or complaint, good or evil, then the sun of speech becomes visible, just as the rays of the celestial sun become visible when they shine upon a wall.

So, the rays from that sun of speech only appear through the medium of letters and sounds. Though always present—for that sun is subtle, and "He is the All-subtle"—some element of grossness is required for it to become visible and apparent.

A certain man said that "God" had no meaning for him—the word left him bewildered and cold. When they said, "This is God's Creation, these are His Commandments, and these are His Laws," then he felt warmth from those rays. So, although God's subtlety was always existing and shining upon that man, until they explained it to him through the medium of Commandment, Creation, and Law, he was unable to see.

There are people who become sick and cannot enjoy the taste of honey. Yet, when combined with another food, such as mixed into rice dressed with turmeric or halvah, they can eat it. After recovering from their illness, they take pleasure in honey directly again, without any medium.

Therefore, speech is a subtle sun shining continually, without ceasing, and we need some gross medium in order to see and enjoy it. But, once you can see those rays and that subtlety without any outer form, then you find wonderful colors and marvelous spectacles in the depths of that sea. But what is so amazing about that? Speech is always within you, whether you actually speak or not, even if you have no thought of speaking.

Philosophers say, "The human being is a speaking animal." Animality is always within you as long as you are living, just as speech is always within you. Chewing is one expression of animality. It is not a state of itself. In the same way, speaking and talking are only reflections of speech.

People have three spiritual states. In the first they have no thought of God at all, but worship and pay service to everything else: friends and lovers, wealth and children, stones and clods. Once they gain a little knowledge and awareness, they want to serve nothing but God. However, after learning and seeing more they enter a state of silence. They do not say, "I serve God," nor "I do not serve God," for they have transcended both. No sound issues from these people to the world.

*"God is neither present nor absent, for God is the Creator of both."*

All words, all sciences, all skills, all professions derive their flavor and relish from speech. The end of that chapter cannot be known, for they are only expressions and not the state, itself. This is illustrated by the man, who in seeking the hand of a wealthy and beautiful woman, looks after her sheep and horses and waters her orchards. Though his time is occupied with those services, their flavor derives from the woman. If the woman were to disappear, those tasks would become cold and lifeless. In this same way, all professions and sciences derive life, pleasure, and warmth from the rays of the saints' inspiration. But for their inspiration, all tasks would be utterly without flavor and enjoyment.

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi describes the essential quality of Soul: Its continual communication with Life.

This does not mean our words and thoughts, but our inner dialogue and exchange. It never ends. We are always speaking.

Through this Speech beyond words, Soul creates and expresses. This spiritual dialogue is the sun that warms our world. Often hidden by the clouds of our thoughts and words, the sun still bathes the whole world and gives birth to all the living things of our life.

To engage in this Speech consciously is to become a channel for God. All of humanity's creation derives its breath from this Speech, though few ever realize it.

If the channels for God were to disappear, all spiritual paths would become cold and lifeless.

# Fifty-Four

RUMI SAYS: When I began composing poetry, a great urge compelled me. At that time the inspiration was strong. Now the desire is weaker and is declining, but still has its effect. Such is the way of God. It grants life to things in the time of their rising, producing great creations and wisdom, but even when declining Its influence has Its force. "The Lord of the East and the West," means, "God fosters both the rising and declining."

The Mutazilites believe that people create their own acts; that every deed springs out of our own creation. But this cannot be true, since everything that we do is produced through our mind, spirit, senses, and body. We haven't created any of these tools. Since we are not the creator and are not capable of creating such things, then they can never be fully under our control. And it is impossible for us to create anything without these instruments.

Therefore, we realize that the true creator of our actions is not our own selves, but God. We perform every effort, whether good or evil, according to our own plan and purpose, but the wisdom of the deed is not limited to our intentions. We are only able to see the portion of wisdom and benefits that derive from our actions. God, however, knows the full advantage of that deed and what fruits it will bear.

For instance, you pray for rewards in the next world and to acquire a good name and safety in the present. But the help derived from prayer is not limited to that—it also bestows a hundred thousand benefits you would never imagine. Only God, who inspires your prayer, knows those advantages.

We are like a bow in the grip of God's hand. God sends us out upon various tasks. In reality God is the agent, not the bow. The bow is merely an instrument, unaware and unconscious of God, so that the world's apparent outward display can be maintained. Mighty indeed is the bow that becomes aware of the Bowman's hand!

What can you say about a world whose perpetuation and order rests on heedlessness? Don't you see how the people who are awakened become indifferent to this world? During childhood, people grow and gain strength through negligence and play. How else can they ever grow up to become men and women? Therefore, God puts us through pains and labors to wash away those acts of negligence and make us clean. Only then are we able to become aware of the other world.

The human being is like a dunghill, a heap of manure. If this manure-heap is precious, it is only because hidden within it is the seal ring of the King.

You are like a sack of corn. The King cries out, "Where are you taking that corn? My cup is in there." People are unaware of the cup, being absorbed in the corn. If they knew of the king's cup, how could the corn ever distract them?

Every thought that draws you toward the other world, turning you cold and indifferent to this lower world, is a reflection of that cup flashing out. When men and women yearn after this lower world, however, this is a sign that the king's treasure is still hidden in the heap.

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## COMMENTARY

Most people see only the benefits of youth and growth, but there is great spiritual unfoldment in the declining and death of life.

*"God fosters both the rising and declining."*

Even on the spiritual path, seekers look for moments of inspiration and the bliss of God and miss the treasures hidden in the down cycles.

There are two currents stirring all things: The outward flow from the Godhead that creates and inspires the outward display of the world, and the returning hidden stream that carries all of life back to its source.

Those who believe only in their own efforts see only the outward flow that takes them farther and farther away from themselves. Sooner or later all creations crumble, like sand castles on the beach. They are dissolved by the waves and returned to the sea.

Don't miss this great ride back. That is where you find the mystical cup within you.

# Fifty-Five

SOMEONE SAYS TO RUMI: "Qadi Izz al-Din sends his greetings and always speaks of you in the most approving terms."

Rumi answers:

*Whoever remembers and speaks of us well,*
*Long may the world of their high merit tell.*

When people speak well of others, those good words reflect back on themselves. In the end they are praising and applauding their own essence. Those who cultivate the habit of speaking well of others are like gardeners who plant flowers and aromatic herbs around their houses—wherever they look they see a beautiful display and are always in Paradise.

Whenever we speak well of another, that person becomes a friend. When we remember them, we remember a friend, and thinking of a friend is like being near flowers and fragrant herbs. It is refreshment and repose. But when we speak ill of others, those people become repulsive in our eyes. When we think of them or when their image even enters our thoughts, it is the same as snakes or scorpions, thorns or thistles appearing before us.

Since you can have flowers, herbs, and the meadows of Iram, why do you choose to walk among the brambles and thorns? Think well of everyone so that you always dwell amongst the fields and meadows. Once you become the enemy of everyone, the images of your foes surround you day and night like scorpions and snakes.

This is why saints have love for all people and think positively of everyone they meet—not for the sake of others, but solely for themselves. Since, in this world no one can escape talking about other people or encountering their images, the saints struggle to hold everything in their mind and memory in an amiable and positive light, so that hateful images will not block their way.

So, whatever you say of others returns to yourself. Mohammad said:

> *"Whoever does good, it is to their own gain, and whoever does evil, it is to their own loss. And whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it."*

Someone asks a question about the following quote from the Koran:

> *"God declared: 'I am setting in the earth a viceroy.'*
>
> *"The angels said: 'What? Will You set there one who does corruption and sheds blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?'"*

"Since Adam had not yet come into the world, how could the angels know beforehand that the human race would be corrupt and shed blood?"

Rumi answers: There are two explanations—one traditional, and the other rational. The traditional version says that the angels read from the Preserved Tablet that people would come forth who would act like this. The rational version says that the angels deduced by reasoning that people would come from the earth, and such people would bear the qualities of the earth, like animals. Although the spiritual element would be present in human beings, namely that they could speak, yet since animality would also be in them, they would by necessity be ungodly and shed blood, this being the heritage of being human.

There is also another answer. Some people say that angels, being pure reason and goodness, have no choice in anything they say or do. Like in a dream, if you have no choice of your own actions, how can you be criticized when you utter unbelief in your sleep, or declare God is One, or commit adultery? Angels are like this in their waking state. People are the reverse of that—they have freewill, are lustful and passionate, desire all things for themselves, and are ready to shed blood to gain what they want. These are the attributes of animals. Thus, the state of the angels is the opposite of people.

It is perfectly fine to say that angels spoke in this fashion, even though they have neither speech nor tongue, because if they were endowed with words and gave an account of themselves, this is how they would speak. In this same way the poet writes, "The pool said, I am full." Pools of course do not really speak, but the poet means that if the pool had a tongue, this is what it would have said.

Every angel has a tablet within them, and from that tablet, according to the degree of their own powers, they can read all that is to happen in the world and everything that will take place. When the moment arrives and what they have read actually comes into being, then their belief becomes stronger and their love and intoxication increases. They marvel at God's majesty and omniscience. That increase of love and faith, that wordless and unexpressed wonder, is the angel's praise of God.

Thus, a builder tells their apprentice, "In this house being built, so much wood will be used, so many bricks, so many stones, and so much straw." When the house is complete and exactly that amount of material was used, neither more nor less, then the faith of the apprentice grows. The angels, too, are in a similar situation.

Someone asks: "The Prophet had such majesty that God said, 'But for thee I would not have created the heavens,' and, yet, Mohammad said, 'Would that the Lord of Mohammad had not created Mohammad.' How can this be?"

Rumi answers: Let me offer a comparison to help you understand the meaning. In a certain village a man fell in love with a woman. The two lived together in happiness and pleasure. They grew fat and thrived on one another. They lived through each other, just as fish live in water. Many years they were together. Then one day God made them wealthy, bestowing on them many sheep, oxen and horses, gold, servants and slaves.

Because of their great fortune and prosperity, they set out for the city. Each purchased a royal palace, with horses and retinue—she in one part of the city and he in another. Once they reached their peak of wealth, they were no longer able to enjoy each other's company. Their hearts smoldered away within them, and they uttered secret lamentations, being unable to speak. The consuming fire in them became so violent that they entirely perished in the flames of separation. The torture of their grief passed all bounds. Finally their longing was heard by God.

Their horses and sheep began to vanish, and little by little they were restored to their former condition. So, after a long while, they were reunited in their home village and resumed full enjoyment of their life together. When they recalled the bitterness of their separation, they cried, "Would that our Lord had never granted us such wealth."

As long as Mohammad's soul was dwelling in the world of holiness and union with God, he grew and thrived, plunging about in that sea of compassion like a fish. But, in this earthly world, even though he was endowed with the rank of prophet and guide to humanity, and granted greatness, majesty, fame, and a large following, still on returning to that former joyous life he said, "Would that I never became a prophet or came into this world."

All these sciences, struggles, and acts of devotion—in comparison to the merit and majesty of God, mean no more than bowing once, performing a service, and leaving. Even if you moved the whole Earth with your service, it would amount to the same as bowing once to the ground. For God's merit and graciousness existed long before your life and service.

Did He bring you forth, give you existence, and make you capable of service and worship that you should boast of serving Him? These services and sciences are just as if you carved little shapes of wood and leather, then came to offer them up to God, saying, "I like these little shapes. I made them, but it is Your job to give them life. If You give them life, You will make my works live. Or, You do not have to—the command is entirely Yours."

Abraham said, "God is He who gives life and death." Nimrod said, "I give life and death." When God gave Nimrod kingship, he deemed himself omnipotent as well, not attributing this credit to God. Nimrod said, "I too bring life to some and cause others to die, and what I desire throughout my kingdom comes from my knowledge." When God bestows knowledge, sagacity, and shrewdness, people claim all credit for themselves, saying, "Through my skill and abilities, I gave life to these actions and have attained ecstatic joy." Abraham said, "No, it is God who gives life and brings death."

Someone says: "Abraham said to Nimrod, 'My God is He who brings up the sun out of the east and sends it down in the west. God brings the sun from the east. If you claim to be a god, then do the reverse." But then Nimrod compelled Abraham to abandon this point, and Abraham left his first argument and Nimrod's rejoinder unanswered, embarking upon another proof."

Rumi answers: Others have talked nonsense about this, and now you, too, are talking nonsense. Abraham gave one and the same argument in two different forms. You have misunderstood, and so did they.

There are many meanings underlying this statement. One meaning is this: God brought you out of the concealment of non-existence from your mother's womb. Your "east" was your mother's womb. From there you rose, and you will go down into the "west" of your tomb. This is precisely the first statement, only expressed in another way: "He gives life and brings death. Now, if you are able, bring forth life from the west of the tomb, and send it back to the east of the womb."

That is one meaning—here is another: Through obedience, disciplined effort, and noble actions Gnostics attain illumination and spiritual intoxication, but when they abandon such devotion and effort their happiness goes down like the sinking sun. Therefore, these two states are their "east" and "west." "So, if you are able to bring life into the state of death through abandonment of God, corruption, and disobedience, then do the opposite and out of this setting sun manifest the illumination that only rises out of devotion."

But that is not the job of the servant. The servant will never be able to do that. This is God's job; for if He wishes He causes the sun to rise from the west, and if He wishes from the east.

The unbeliever and the believer both express the praises of God. For God has promised that anyone who chooses the right road and practices right action, following the sacred law and the way of the prophets and saints, shall be granted happiness, illumination and life. If they do the reverse, they will be granted darkness and fear, sorrow and suffering. Since both believer and unbeliever choose as they do, and what God has promised comes to pass precisely, neither more nor less, then both are proclaiming the praises of God—the believer with one tongue, and the unbeliever with another. How great that difference is between the praises of one and the praises of the other!

For instance, a thief is caught stealing and is hung on the gallows. That thief is a preacher to the world, saying, "Whoever commits a theft, this is what becomes of them." On another person, the king bestows a robe of honor due to their trustworthiness. They are also a preacher to the world. But the thief preaches with one tongue, and the trusty servant with another. Consider the difference between these two preachers!

## COMMENTARY

Once again, Rumi corrects a misunderstanding about the discussion between Nimrod and Abraham in the Koran. But this time, Rumi takes the discussion in a different direction: He focuses on the way in which the Path has been laid out by God, so that the sun of illumination rises for those who pursue spiritual efforts, devote themselves to Truth, take up disciplines and spiritual practices and choose noble actions. While those who go in the opposite direction eventually lose their guiding light and find emptiness.

Once we see this focus of Rumi's at the end of this discourse, we can see that this was what he was also talking about from the beginning. He was trying to show us how the spiritual laws that lie beneath all of life must be discovered inwardly, as these laws are inherent parts of who we are.

He started out the discourse by describing why we should always think and speak kindly towards others, and why the saints give goodwill to all and think favorably about everyone—since this is the Way that has been laid out.

> *Think well of everyone so that you always dwell amongst the fields and meadows.*

The thoughts we hold and the words we speak create our life's experience. They surround us invisibly, whether we are aware of it or not. It has been established this way so that we can see our own power of creation that we have been granted, and to learn the importance of using this power for the sake of the Path and in God's name.

We know this is true because we can see the results. We can see the way our own life changes once we align ourselves to this truth.

Next, when Rumi answers the question about angels and their reaction to the creation of mankind, he again takes his discussion in the same direction: The angels react this way because this is how they were created. They cannot help but obey the Path because this is their nature. It is mankind that they cannot understand. Men and women have such an animal nature that they attack each other out of selfishness, anger, and fear. Why would God create such base urges that take them away from God's Way?

The answer to the angels' question is within themselves even before they ask it, but they also ask it because in watching the wonder of God's plan unfold they see the wisdom and beauty and perfection of it. They see how people learn from their animal nature, from bloodshed and brutality, from lust and desire, and their own experiences lead them to understanding what has been laid out within themselves as the pattern to live by. Finding and following this brings their awakening and spiritual freedom.

Of course, this is also the lesson of the story about the man and woman who were given wealth and prosperity, but came to realize that was not what they wanted after all. These things were not what brought them happiness. Just as Mohammad realized, all the accomplishments of the world mean nothing compared to living in God's presence and the awareness of God. Discovering the hidden plan of Soul leads us to the One who placed this miracle within us. Realizing the majesty of such a plan opens for us the door to the Godhead.

# Fifty-Six

AFTER AN HOUR OF CONTEMPLATION with his students, Rumi says: You are now experiencing happiness. Why? Because the mind is a delicate thing, and like a snare it was properly set to catch its prey. When you are unhappy, then that snare is torn and broken.

Therefore, it is best not to be excessive in love or hatred towards others, since both of these leave the snare broken and torn. Moderation is best. By excessive love, I mean love for other than God. How can love for God ever be excessive? It is inconceivable: The greater our love for God, the better.

When our love for someone else becomes excessive, we hope they will only experience good fortune, but that is impossible, and so the mind becomes disturbed. Similarly, when enmity is excessive, we wish our enemy only bad luck and misfortune, but the wheel of heaven is ever turning, and everyone's circumstances are also revolving. One moment they are lucky, the next unlucky. This seems unfair and disturbing to the mind.

Love for God is latent in all people, Magians, Jews, or Christians, and in all things that have being. How can anyone not love Him who is the source of their existence? Therefore, love is latent in everyone, but circumstances veil that love. When the situation changes, then love becomes manifest again.

Yet, why only speak of things that have being? Even non-being churns in the hope and expectation of being granted existence. Non-beings are like people standing before a king, each one hoping the king will grant them special rank, and yet each one ashamed before the others, because their own desires contradict each other. So they stand, filled with their expectation of finding existence through God, yet each desiring to be first and therefore embarrassed before one another. If non-beings are in such a condition, how should those in existence be?

*"There is nothing that does not proclaim His praise."*

This is not remarkable. What is remarkable is that even no-thing proclaims His praise.

*Both faith and unbelief are seeking Thee*
*And shouting Thy undivided Unity.*

This house is built out of forgetfulness. All the bodies and forms of this world are sustained through forgetfulness. Our own full-grown forms grew through our forgetting. Even the remembrance of God cannot exist without forgetfulness, since something must be forgotten before there can be remembrance. Therefore, faith and unbelief are one and the same; one does not exist without the other. They are indivisible, and God is one. God is alone and has no partner.

Someone says: "Sayed Burhan al-Din discourses very well, yet he quotes Sana'i too frequently."

Rumi answers: What you say is true: the sun is excellent, yet it gives light. Is that a fault? Using Sana'i's words casts light on his discourse. The sun casts light on things, and through light it is possible to see. The purpose of light is seeing. After all, this sun in our heaven illuminates things that have no use. But the real sun shows things that are of use. This worldly sun is a reflection and a metaphor. That real sun is the true sun. Do you yearn for the real sun and seek the light of knowledge? Then be expectant of understanding and learning something from every teacher and every friend.

We know about that other sun, apart from our physical sun, from which the realities and inner truths are revealed. Yet this partial knowledge that draws you and through which you feel pleasure is but a branch of that great knowledge and a ray of it. This ray is calling you to the original sun.

*"Those—they are called from a far place."*

You try to draw that knowledge towards yourself, but it answers you, "I cannot be contained in your world, it is impossible, and you have stayed away so long because it is difficult to reach me." Now, what is impossible is impossible, but what is difficult is not impossible. So, strive to attain that great knowledge, but do not expect to contain it here.

The wealthy ones, out of their love for God's wealth, collect penny by penny, grain by grain. But the ray of wealth says, "I am calling to you from infinite wealth. Why do you try drawing me piece by piece? I cannot be contained in pieces. Listen, and follow me to unlimited riches."

In short, the beginning depends upon the end. May the end be praiseworthy!

What is a praiseworthy end? It is when a tree's roots are fixed firmly in the spiritual garden, even though its branches, boughs, and fruits hang over another land where its fruits have been scattered—that in the end those fruits should be carried back to the garden of their original roots. But if the roots of a tree belong to this world, even if they outwardly proclaim the praises of God, all its fruits should be carried back to this world.

And if both roots and fruit thrive in the spiritual garden, then that is "Light upon Light."

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## COMMENTARY

If we become too concerned about the affairs of the world, the delicate snare of our mind becomes torn and cannot catch the beauty and cannot sense the balance of life.

Remember that the original roots of Soul, our true Self, reside in the spiritual garden of God's presence. See that the fruits of that tree are allowed to ripen in that garden.

The meaning of this is that our lives will always be filled with desires and disappointments of the outer world, and we must live and work with those who are completely lost in their physical lives, but make sure that you do not forget your inner life that lives and thrives in spiritual essence. Through contemplation and spiritual exercises, cultivate that inner garden, and you will find your mind is able to catch the subtle breeze of Spirit that blows across the land and touches all things.

# Fifty-Seven

AKMAL AL-DIN spoke to others in the room about his feelings towards Rumi: "I love our Master and desire to see him. Even heaven is blotted out of my mind. I find comfort in his image without the need for any discourses or lofty ideas. I rest in his beauty. Pleasure comes to me from his very mien—even from a mental picture of him."

Rumi responds: Although heaven and God do not enter your thoughts, still they are implicit in your love. A beautiful dancing-girl was once playing the castanets in the presence of the Caliph. The Caliph said, "Your art is in your hands." She replied, "No, in my feet, great Caliph! Excellence appears in my hands only because they have captured the excellence of my feet."

Although you do not remember heaven in every detail, still your delight in seeing the Sheikh, and your fear of being separated from him, contain all those details. All of heaven is captured in that image.

A family cherishes and loves each other. If thoughts of their care and fidelity, compassion and fondness, and all the other benefits that kinsmen look for from kinsmen—if these thoughts do not enter their minds, still all these details are implicit. In the same way, air is implicit in wood, whether that wood is buried in earth or drenched in water. Without air in wood, fire could have no effect upon it, for air is the fuel of fire, the life of fire. Have you not seen how a breath of air puts life into fire? Whether wood is in water or earth, still air is latent in it. If air were not latent, wood would never rise to the surface of water.

It is the same with the words you speak. Many things are contained in those words, such as intelligence and thought, lips and mouth, throat and tongue, as well as the elements and temperaments, the influence of the stars, and the hundred thousand secondary causes upon which the world depends. On and on you can trace these causes until you come to the world of attributes, and then essences—although none of these realities are put into words, yet all is implicit in your words.

Every day, undesirable and painful experiences happen to us without our freewill. Certainly these things are not our choice and are beyond our creation. This shows that we are under the control of Someone beyond. The thought of evil acts brings pain, unless we know that Someone watches over and protects us. But even with the continual occurrence of these unwanted experiences, our nature rejects the idea that we are under the control of another. We are not comfortable with such a thought.

*"God created Adam in His image."*

Divinity, which is the opposite of servanthood, is given to us on loan. We can be beaten over the head, still we won't let go of that borrowed stubbornness. We forget about our unwanted experiences and we cannot hear their message. Until that borrowed divinity becomes our own, we will not escape from being slapped.

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## COMMENTARY

Akmal al-Din was Rumi's disciple and also his physician, during Rumi's last days. However, in these words of worship and adoration from Akmal toward Rumi, his teacher, Rumi heard something that was missing, and he wanted Akmal to understand.

In the subtlest way possible, Rumi creates a great arc with his point, to circle and come back to a message he is giving in the kindest way: Even with your great worship and humility, you will not escape the slaps of life until the divinity you seek becomes your own.

He is encouraging Akmal to look to the source of this feeling of devotion that even blots out heaven, to show him that it is trying to lead him to something much greater.

In a sense, it is as if Rumi were saying: Not too much love for me, or you will lose your self—that part of yourself that knows these very qualities you see in me, because they are also in you. It is the flow of divine love from heaven that is inherent in this love for me. That love you feel is merely flowing through me from the higher worlds.

> *Although heaven and God do not enter your thoughts, still they are implicit in your love.*

It is in the nature of religious worship to bow before icons, saints, and holy books, but this outer devotion only brings us to the doorway. There is something within us that stubbornly rejects the idea of a greater power than ourselves, because we feel the shadow of God's essence within us. It takes a different kind of bowing to open these doors and let us step through.

After crossing this threshold—passing through the inner Master and the sacred images of God—we find that divine state of being that surrounds us and protects us from all the worries of the world. Only then will we see where the love for God and the Master is trying to lead us.

This is what Rumi wishes for Akmal, but he knows that only one in a thousand will understand it.

# Fifty-Eight

RUMI RELATES A STORY:

A certain Gnostic once said, "I went to the baths to expand my heart, since the baths had become the place of retreat for certain saints. I saw that the master of the bath stove had an apprentice. The master was telling the apprentice, 'Do this and do that.' The apprentice was working briskly, and the stove gave off good heat because of how nimbly the orders were obeyed.

"'Good,' said the master, 'be nimble like this. If you are always energetic and mind your manners, one day I will give you my position and appoint you to my place.'

"I was overcome with laughter," said the Gnostic, "and my inner knot was dissolved, for I saw in that moment that all the bosses of this world behave like this with their apprentices."

## COMMENTARY

This is a great teaching story in itself, worth contemplating to understand it fully. Rumi is giving it out for this very reason.

However, we should also ask: Why is Rumi telling this tale now?

Remember, Rumi's life is nearing its end, and there are those amongst his students wondering if Rumi will declare who his successor will be.

Spiritual leadership, however, is not passed on in this way.

Re-read this story and you will see that Rumi is pointing to something greater. He is encouraging his students to look beyond the limited nature of appointed authority and rank, to search for the true spiritual awakening that comes directly from God and brings so much more.

# Fifty-Nine

SOMEONE SAYS: "The astronomers say: You claim there is something beyond the heavens and this terrestrial ball. We believe, apart from what we see, nothing exists. If something exists, then show us where it is!"

Rumi answers: This demand is invalid from the start. You say, "Show me where it is," but, that spiritual reality has no place. Come then, tell me, where is your objection? Is it on your tongue, in your mouth, or within your breast? Search through all of these, divide them piece by piece, atom by atom, and you will still not find your objection or thought. From this we realize that thought has no place. Since you do not know the location of your own thought, how could you know where the Creator of thought resides?

Thousands of emotions and moods come over you without your choice, for they are completely outside your power and control. If you only knew where these emotions came from, you would be able to build on them. All these emotions pass over you, and yet you don't know their source, where they are going, or what they are trying to do. Since you are incapable of penetrating your own moods, how do you expect to penetrate your Creator?

Those sons of whores say, "God is not in the heavens." You cur, how do you know God is not? Yes, you have measured the heavens span by span. You have searched across all of the sky, and you pronounce, "God is not in the heavens." You do not even know the whore you have in your own home. How could you know the heavens? Oh yes, you have heard of heaven, and the names of stars and the spheres. You think that is something. If you really understood the depths of the heavens or attained even one single step, you would never utter such nonsense.

When we say that God is not in the heavens, we do not mean that God is not in the heavens. We mean that heaven cannot contain God, while God contains all. God has an ineffable link with the heavens, just as He has established a hidden link with you. All things are in the hand of God's omnipotence, within His creation, and under His control. Therefore, God is not outside the heavens and the universe, nor is He wholly in them. In other words, these things do not comprehend God; and yet God comprehends all.

Someone says: "Before earth, heaven, and the Throne existed, where did God exist?"

One of Rumi's students answers: "This question is invalid from the start, for God is One who has no place."

Rumi says: You ask, "Where was God before all this?" Have you first discovered the place of all these things within you, that you are now searching for God's place? Since your moods and thoughts have no place, how can the space for God be conceivable?

Surely, the Creator of thought is subtler than thought. For instance, those who build a house are subtler than that house, because they are able to make and plan a hundred other buildings, each different from the last. Therefore, they are subtler and more majestic than the materials they use, but this higher essence can only be seen after they build a house and their work enters the visible world.

Your breath is visible in winter, but in summer it is invisible. This doesn't mean that your breath stops in warmer weather, but in summer your breath is subtler and cannot be seen. In the same way your attributes and essential elements are too veiled to be known until you perform some act. For instance, your clemency exists, but it cannot be seen until you forgive an offender. Then your kindness becomes visible. Similarly, your vengefulness is invisible until you take up revenge against criminals and beat them. Then your desire for justice is seen.

Due to God's extreme subtlety, He cannot be seen. So He created heaven and earth, that His omnipotence and His handiwork would be visible.

*"Don't you see those heavens above all the created worlds?"*

These words I speak are not under my complete control. I am pained, because I would like to counsel my friends and help them. However, the words do not always come as I wish. This brings pain. But I am happy, because these words are higher than I, and I am subject to them. The words that God speaks bring life wherever they reach, and leave a deep impression.

*"And when you threw, it was not you who threw, but God."*

No shield or breastplate can stop the arrow that leaps from the bow of God. Therefore, I am happy.

If we knew everything there was to know and all ignorance was eliminated, we would be swallowed up and cease to be. Therefore, ignorance is a good thing: Through ignorance this world continues to exist. Knowledge is also important, for it leads to the awareness of God. Thus, each is a partner with the other, and all opposites are joined.

Night is the opposite of day, yet they are partners and both do the same work. If night lasted forever, no work would ever be accomplished, while if day lasted forever, our eyes would become dazzled and our brains would go insane. Therefore we rest and sleep at night, and the brain, thought, hands, feet, hearing, and sight, all gather strength. By day they use up these powers.

So all things appear as opposites, but to the wise they are all working together and are not opposed. Show me an evil in this world without good, or a good thing without evil.

For instance, a man intent on murder becomes preoccupied with the man's wife, and as a result he sheds no blood. There is no doubt that taking the man's wife is evil, but since this saves her husband's life, she also sees it as good. Therefore evil and good are inseparable.

This is our main quarrel with the Magians. They say there are two Gods: the creator of good and the creator of evil. Show me good without evil—then I will admit there is a God of evil and a God of good! This is impossible, for good cannot exist without evil. Since there is no separation between them, how can there be two creators?

Are we arguing against you? By all means, we most definitely are. But we will not push this point too far, because otherwise you might start wondering if the Magians are right. Granted, you aren't sure what I'm saying is correct, but how can you be sure that it isn't?

Mohammad said, "Wretched unbeliever, haven't you realized the warnings that We made might come true, and punishment might come down upon the unbelievers as you have never imagined? Then why do you not take precautions and seek after Us?"

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## COMMENTARY

Rumi speaks some severe words, calling his challenger "you cur" and saying, "you do not even know the whore you have in your own home," meaning that this man does not even understand the nature of this belief he has chosen to adopt from others.

Moments later, Rumi admits that his own words pain him. This is not the way he likes to talk. He would rather counsel in a friendly way and inspire others. However, he trusts in what is coming through him and that there is a reason for it. He sees a higher purpose behind such stern words.

> *No shield or breastplate can stop the arrow that leaps from the bow of God.*

Rumi is illustrating here the comments he is making about understanding our beliefs and thoughts. Few are aware of where they come from or what their purpose is. If we knew, we could see and work with the source consciously. We would not become so identified with our ideas as to imagine they are our creations. Often, emotions pass through us like clouds passing over the land.

Rumi's point: These feelings, these reactions, moods, ideas, and even the beliefs we take up, do not come from us. If we are unaware of their source and the true nature of our own selves, how can we ever expect to understand God?

# Sixty

THE PROPHET SAYS that Abu Bakr was superior to the other Companions, not due to his prayer and fasting, but because the special favor—love of God—was with him. On the resurrection day, a person's prayers will be placed in the balance along with their fasting and generosity. But once love is brought forth, it cannot be contained by any balance. Therefore, love is the root of the spiritual path.

When you see love in your heart, encourage it to grow. When you find this original investment within yourself, namely your desire for God, increase it through searching. "In movement is a blessing." If you do not build on it, even the original desire will fade away and leave you.

Are you less than the earth? Farmers turn the earth with a hoe and it yields crops. When they abandon it, it becomes hard. So, when you find the quest for Truth within yourself, follow it wherever it leads. Do not say, "What use is there in following this desire?" Just go! The purpose will show itself.

Everyone goes to the market to fulfill their needs. God grants both the desires and provisions for each person, but if someone sits at home acting as if they are self-sufficient, then their necessities will never reach them. After all, when a baby cries, her mother feeds her. Now, if the child stopped to think, "What is the use in crying? How could crying possibly cause the milk to flow?" she would stay hungry. Therefore, crying brings her food.

This is the same as asking, "What use is there in this bowing and prayer? Why should I do it?" Well, when you bow before a prince, the prince has compassion for you, doesn't he? But this compassion doesn't come from the prince's skin and bones. Should you die, or if you were asleep, then bowing to the prince's body accomplishes nothing. So we realize that the compassion of the prince is something invisible. If we can bow to something invisible contained in a body, surely we can also bow to that Prince who has no flesh.

If everything contained in skin were visible, Abu Jahl and Mohammad would have been the same. There would have been no difference between them. An ear, to outward appearance, is the same whether deaf or able to hear. In both cases their visible shape is the same. Therefore, spiritual hearing exists invisibly and cannot be seen.

So the root of the matter is Divine grace. You, being a prince, have two slaves. One performs spiritual services and makes numerous inward journeys on your behalf. The other is idle in serving you. Your love for the idle servant is greater. You do not intend to let the active one go unrewarded, but that is what happens.

It is impossible to determine the cause of God's grace. This right eye and this left eye both appear the same. What service has the right eye performed that the left eye has not? And the right hand—what work has it done that the left hand has not done? Yet Divine favor has fallen on the right hand and right eye. So too, Friday is now preferred over the rest of the days.

> *"God has certain portions to bestow on people other than those inscribed on the Tablet. Let everyone seek for them on Friday."*

Now what service has Friday performed that the other days have not? Yet a special mark of honor and grace have been bestowed upon Friday.

If a blind person says, "I was created blind like this, it is not my fault," it does them no good. It doesn't relieve them of their suffering. Those infidels who are fixed in unbelief—they suffer because of their unbelief. Yet looking at the matter again, that suffering is also a Divine blessing. When the unbelievers are at ease they forget the Source, so God reminds them through suffering. Therefore, Hell is a place of worship and is the mosque of infidels, for there the unbelievers remember God.

It is the same in prison or with suffering or toothache, when pain comes, it tears away the veil of forgetfulness. Sufferers turn to God and pray, "O Lord, O compassionate One!" They are healed. Then the veils of forgetfulness descend again and they say, "Where is God? I cannot find Him. I don't see Him. Why should I even look?"

How is it that when you were suffering you saw and found, but now you can't see? Suffering prevails over you to help you remember God. The sinner is forgetful in times of ease and does not recollect God. In Hell the sinner remembers night and day.

God created the world, heaven and earth, moon, sun and stars, good and evil, so that we would remember Him, serve Him and proclaim His praise. Since the unbelievers do not remember unless they are suffering, and since their purpose in being created was to recollect God, they are sent suffering to remember Him.

Believers, however, do not forget that suffering—suffering is always present for them. In the same way, once an intelligent child has had its feet put in stocks as punishment, they never forget the stocks. The stupid child, however, forgets and must be put in the stocks every day. So, too, the smart horse, once it feels the spur, does not require the spur again. It carries the rider for leagues without forgetting the sting of the spur. The stupid horse, on the other hand, requires the spur every moment; it is not fit to carry anyone, so they load it with bags of dung.

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## COMMENTARY

More than anything, the doors of our spiritual life are opened by divine grace. All the good works, prayers, and practices we do are insignificant next to the love for God we receive from God.

But this doesn't mean that we should abandon our efforts. If we do not act from this gift of Life, or we forget its importance, it withdraws and leaves our existence empty and filled with pain. Suffering comes to remind us that there is something more.

The wise person only needs to learn this lesson of suffering once. After that, they are always remembering their need and dependency on the life-giving current of love. They let it move them, and they appreciate it every day.

# Sixty-One

HEARING SOMETHING OVER AND OVER from different people carries the same authority as seeing it for yourself. For example, you've been told that you were born to your father and mother. You never saw this with your own eyes, but after hearing it many times from the doctor, nurse, and family who were there, you accept it as true. If someone told you that they were not your parents, you would ignore them.

Similarly, you have heard repeatedly about Baghdad and Mecca from trusted people who've been there. If all those people now swore an oath that those cities did not exist, you would not believe them. Therefore, when the ear has heard the same thing repeatedly from many experienced sources, it carries the same authority as the eye.

In the same way, if someone states a well-known saying that has been handed down generation after generation, then that is not a single statement but a hundred thousand. What is so surprising in this? A king exercises the authority of a hundred thousand, though he is only one—if a hundred thousand should speak nothing would happen, but when he speaks it happens immediately.

While this is the way of the external world, it is even truer of spiritual reality.

You may have seen this whole world, but since you have not seen it with God in mind, then you must make the trip again.

> *"Journey across the world and see the outcome of those who deny God."*

"That journey was not on My account, it was for the sake of garlic and onions. Since you did not go about for My sake, but for another purpose, then that other purpose became a veil to you, not allowing you to see Me."

It is the same as searching earnestly for a person in the bazaar—you see nobody else, or if you see them they are like shadows. Or when you are hunting for the solution to a problem in a book, your ears and eyes and mind are full of that one problem. You turn the pages and you see nothing else. Since you had an intention and object in mind, wherever you went you were full of that goal.

In the time of Umar, there was a certain man who had grown so old that his daughter would feed him milk and look after him like a child. Umar said to that daughter, "There is no child alive today to compare with you in your loyalty to your father." She replied, "What you say is true, but there is a difference between what I give him and what my father gave me. I may not fall short in service to my father, but when my father raised and served me he used to tremble for my safety and concern, while I serve my father and pray night and day asking God that he may die, so the trouble he causes me may end. If I serve my father, where can I get that same trembling he has for me?" Umar said, "This woman is wiser than Umar." He meant, "I have judged by externals, while she speaks of the core."

Those who are truly wise penetrate into the core of a thing and diagnose the truth of it. God forbid that Umar was not apprised of the truth and secrets of things, but such was the way of the Companions: They criticized themselves and commended others.

There are many who lack the strength for "presence." They find "absence" more agreeable. In the same way, brightness from the sun illuminates the world, but if people stare at the sun's orb all day it does them no good and their eyes become dazzled. It would be better for them to engage in another task and leave the presence of the sun's orb. Similarly, talking about tasty dishes in the presence of sick people encourages them to gain strength and appetite, but the actual consumption of those dishes could do them harm.

Therefore, trembling and passionate love are necessary in the quest for God. Whoever does not tremble must wait upon the tremblers. No fruit ever grows on the trunk of a tree, for trunks do not tremble. The tips of the branches tremble, and the trunk supports the tips of the branches and the fruit securely, even against the blow of an ax. Since the trembling of the tree trunk would end in ruin, it is better for the trunk not to tremble. It suits the trunk to be quiet, to better serve the tremblers.

The Amir's name is Mu'in al-Din ("Champion of the Faith"), but this is not the same as 'Ain al-Din ("Essence of the Faith") because of the "M" added to the 'Ain. "Any addition to perfection is a diminution." The addition of that "M" lessens it. In the same way, though a sixth finger is an addition, still it detracts from a hand. Ahad ("One") is perfection, but Ahmad ("Highly Praised") is not yet complete. When that "M" is removed it becomes complete perfection. In other words, God comprehends all—whatever you add to God is a reduction. The number one is contained in all numbers, and without it no number could exist.

Sayed Burhan al-Din was teaching, when a fool interrupted him to say, "We need some words without comparisons or likenesses." The Sayed answered, "Whoever is without any likeness, come and listen to words that have no likeness!"

After all, you are a likeness of your true self. You are not this body. The existence here is but a shadow of you. If someone dies, people say, "So-and-so has departed." If they were only that body, then where have they gone? Your outer form is an analogy of your internal being, and from your external form others can judge your inner reality. Everything is visible because of density. Thus, the breath in hot weather cannot be seen, but when it is cold it becomes visible due to density.

It was the duty of the Prophet to manifest the power of God by preaching, to awaken others. It was not his job, however, to bring people to the stage of being ready to receive God's truth—that is God's work.

God has two attributes: wrath and loving-kindness. The prophets are theaters for both. To believers they are a theater for God's love. To their enemies they become a theater for God's wrath.

Those who acknowledge Truth see themselves in the Prophet, hear their own voice proceeding from him, and smell their own scent in his presence. No one denies the reality of their own self. Therefore, the prophets say to the community, "We are you, and you are we, there is no strangeness between us."

Someone says, "This is my hand." Nobody asks them for proof, since their hand is a part of them. But if they say, "So-and-so is my son," then proof is demanded, for that is something separate from them.

## COMMENTARY

Personal experience and seeing for ourselves is our basis for knowing what is true. But when we hear the same truths spoken down through the ages, across all the regions and cultures of the world, by those who have journeyed into the heart of God, then these teachings carry with them the weight of Truth.

Hearing a message over and over from many sources has the same power as seeing it for ourselves. Within the subtle inner worlds this influence is even more powerful. There, we can see and feel the force behind spiritual teachings, and we can see how they stream out upon the world.

We have not recognized this before because we were not walking the Path. Our own desires preoccupied us, so we couldn't see what was taking place before our eyes. Therefore, we must go back and start over, seeing everything again from Life's purpose.

None of this can be experienced directly without a deep trembling for love. Those who are the tremblers are the lovers of Truth and the spiritual travelers. The world's faiths are enlivened by them. All of the fruit of religion comes from trembling branches. The trunk and solidified portions of religious institutions cannot tremble, so it is better if they realize that their purpose is to support and serve the tremblers.

How often is this forgotten by organized religion? They get it backwards and think that saints should serve the organization and uphold their traditions and doctrines. They criticize and attack those who are lovers, as if they could add to perfection. But they end up detracting from God's plan, because tremblers are not suited for upholding elaborate structures, and trunks of trees are not designed for producing fruit. This order exists for a purpose. Trying to make the branch tip do the work of the tree trunk degrades them both.

*"We need some words without comparisons or likenesses."*

Rumi says this because he knows that many wish he could speak more directly and just say what he means. But this is not how the true teachings are taught. People hope to find life explained literally and plainly, but this is the same desire that wants to add onto perfection yet ends up reducing it.

There is a reason the spiritual path is not spelled out in clear terms: It cannot be. Those who try to make it explicit end up losing its essence and perfection.

Just as our bodies are reflections of who we truly are, so all of these words spoken about spiritual truth are merely reflections of what is already a part of us. No one can give this meaning to us, because it is already ours.

# Sixty-Two

SOME SAY LOVE is the cause of service, but this isn't true. It is our Beloved's desire that moves us to serve.

If the Beloved wishes for a lover to get involved, then the lover wants nothing else but to help. If the Beloved no longer desires that, then the lover gives it up. Abandoning service is not against love's purpose. No, on the contrary; even when doing nothing, love continues to work through the lover's heart, because the root is love, and service springs out of that root.

The sleeve moves because the hand moves. But this doesn't mean sleeves always follow hands. For instance, if someone wears a gown so large that they can move around inside it, then the gown does not move. We've all seen that. But what is not possible is that the gown could move without the person moving.

Some people mistake the gown for the person. They consider the sleeve a hand, and imagine the boot to be a foot. However, this hand and foot are the sleeve and boot of another hand and foot.

They say, "he is under the foot of So-and-so," and "she has a hand in so many things." Surely, when we speak of such hands and feet we do not mean these hands and feet.

The Prince came and assembled us and then departed. In the same way, the bee unites wax with honey and then flies away. This is because our existence is a state, but our becoming is something else.

Our mothers and fathers are like bees working to unite the seeker with what is sought, bringing together the lover and beloved. Then one day they fly away. God has made them the means for uniting wax with honey; and then they fly away, while the wax and honey remain. But they do not fly out of the garden. This is not the kind of garden that is possible to leave. Rather, they go from one corner of the garden to another.

Our body is like a beehive, assembled from the wax and honey of the love of God. Although the bees, our mothers and fathers, brought that honey and wax together, yet they are also cared for by the gardener, and therefore it is the gardener who makes the beehive. God gives those bees a form appropriate to the work they are doing, but when they depart into the other world they change cloaks, for a different work takes place there. Still, each individual is the same as they were in the first place.

For example: a man goes into battle, puts on his battledress, girds on armor and places a helmet on his head to prepare for combat. But when he comes home for dinner, he takes off those garments, since food and family are another business. Still, he is the same person. However, if you last saw him in his armor, then whenever you think of him, you will picture him in that shape and form, even though he may have changed clothes a hundred times.

A woman loses a ring in a certain place. Even if the ring has been moved, she still circles around that spot, thinking, “It was here that I lost it.” In the same way, a bereaved man walks around a grave, ignorantly circling the plot of earth and kissing it, implying, “I lost that ring here.” But how could it still be there?

God performs so many wonderful works to display His omnipotence. It is here for the sake of Divine wisdom that He brings together spirit and body for a day or two.

People fear death. They worry that sitting with a corpse in a tomb, even for a moment, could drive them mad. So, once they are released from this trap of form and the tomb of the body, why would they remain nearby?

God has appointed the sight of a grave to strike fear into our hearts as a sign. That fear of death is renewed again and again to show us the emptiness of the tomb and desolate earth. In the same way, when a caravan has been ambushed at a certain place on the road, two or three stones are placed together there to act as a way-sign, saying, "Here is a place of danger." Graves are also visible way-signs, showing this world is a place of danger.

Fear makes its mark on you, even if it is not always recognized. For instance, when people say, "So-and-so is afraid of you," affection immediately springs in your heart toward them. On the contrary, if they say, "So-and-so is not in the least bit afraid of you," and "He doesn't worry about you at all," then, simply because of these words, anger appears in your heart.

This running around is the effect of fear. The entire world is running, but everyone runs in different ways, appropriate to their states. The human being's way of running is of one kind, the way a plant runs is another, and the movement of Spirit is altogether different.

For example, Spirit moves without visible steps or signs. Consider the unripe grape, how it pursues sweetness until it attains the blackness of a ripe grape. That running is invisible and imperceptible. But when the grape reaches that stage, it realizes what it had been chasing for so long. Similarly, someone enters a lake without being seen by anyone, but when that person's head suddenly pops up in the middle of the water, then everyone sees how much swimming they have done.

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## COMMENTARY

This idea of serving only in the way that our Beloved desires, is one of the subtlest and most significant of Rumi's teachings. It means that devotion should not start with doctrines or doing what others tell us is the will of God. True spiritual service is not about following traditions or commandments from holy books. It means following our Beloved's desires. Doing only what our Beloved wants.

*The sleeve moves because the hand moves.*

The moment we realize the deep currents of desire that move us, the secret of life becomes an open book. We then can see the purpose of our existence. This discovery is exactly God's desire.

*The Prince came and assembled us and then departed.*

Why would God create us and then leave?

*This is because our existence is a state, but our becoming is something else.*

Our becoming, our living, comes from us. It is our expression. God's desire moves us, whether we realize it or not. But it is only when we consciously act on this inspiration that it changes us. We can't see the real purpose behind everything we do until we trace back our needs to their original source. We experience a sense of completeness and love once we starting working with God. Then we see that this is what we have been made for.

What does God want us .to do? This cannot be answered except with our life and our becoming. The need changes every moment. It is not one thing. Therefore, we are involved in a continual asking, listening, and serving the whole of life.

*God gives those bees a form appropriate to the work they are doing. . . .*

When we leave this life, we enter a new work. When we move into the higher worlds, our involvement with life changes; and, therefore, our forms change as well.

These forms and the work we do are not who we are. We are Soul, no matter what world we are in, or what role we play.

Fear of graves and death grow when people forget who they are. When they start to think they are a body or become attached to their work, then images of death come to remind them that they are something more, and this is only their present task.

> *Abandoning service is not against love's purpose. No, on the contrary; even when doing nothing, love continues to work through the lover's heart…*

We only know that we feel a deep need to grow and to know the purpose of life. We don't know why, until we attain the sweetness of the ripe grape. Then we realize what we have been chasing all along.

# Sixty-Three

LOVERS HAVE HEARTACHES no cure can mend—neither sleeping nor traveling nor eating can comfort them, only sight of the beloved.

*"Meet the Friend, and your sickness will end."*

This is so true that, even if a hypocrite sits in the company of believers, under their influence he can become a believer in an instant. So God declares:

*"When they meet those who believe, they will say, 'We believe.'"*

What, then, about believers who sit with other believers? Since the company of lovers has this effect on hypocrites, consider the benefits it brings to other lovers of God!

Consider how wool, in the hands of a wise weaver becomes a beautiful carpet, and this earth, through the work of imaginative builders, becomes a fine palace! Since intelligent people have such an effect on inanimate things, imagine what effect lovers of God have on other lovers!

By associating with beings of even limited awareness, inanimate things take on great forms and beauty. These creations are shadows of those partial intellects, and from these shadows you can recognize the creators, themselves. So, from this, deduce the Intelligence and the Being that casts Its shadow in the form of yonder heavens, the moon and sun, the seven layers of the world, and everything that lies between the earth and heaven. All these are the shadow of that Universal Intelligence. The shadow of a limited being casts a small shadow proportionate to its body. The shadow of the Universal Being, which is all of Creation, is in proportion to that Whole.

The saints have seen other heavens besides these heavens. This world is unimpressive and seems lowly next to what they have been shown. The saints have set their feet upon those heavens and transcended them.

> *"There are heavens in the province of the soul that hold our*
> *worldly firmament in their control."*

Why is it so amazing that one person, out of all of humanity, should discover the particular quality necessary to set foot upon the head of the seventh heaven? Are we not all made from the same substance as this earth? Yet God planted in us a quality that singles us out from the earth and puts us in control of it. We can change the earth however we wish—now lifting it up, now setting it down. We can fashion it into a palace. We can make it into a cup and goblet. Now we stretch it out, now we shorten it. Perhaps we were first made of this earth and were a part of it, but God has set us apart by means of intelligence. In the same way, why is it so hard to believe that out of our midst, who are all one race, God should distinguish a certain individual, and in relation to him we are like inanimate things—he controlling us and aware of us, while we are unaware of him?

When I say "unaware," I don't mean utterly unaware. I'm referring to the way that people focus their attention on one thing and become unaware of anything else. Even earth, inanimate as it is, knows what God has given it. For if it was not aware, how could it be so receptive to water, and how could it nurse and nourish every seed? When people apply themselves intently and completely to a task, their concentration leaves them oblivious to everything else. But this inattention does not mean total inattention. For example, two people try to catch a cat, but it eludes them. Then, one day the cat is so preoccupied with hunting a bird that it does not see them approaching, so they catch it.

There is no need to become totally preoccupied with worldly affairs. We should take things easily and not get caught in a web of bondage to them, lest in becoming disturbed we bring distress to something greater. The Treasure must not be disturbed, for if this world should worry, That Other World will transform it, but if That Other World is vexed (May we seek refuge with God!) then who will transform That?

If, for instance, you have many kinds of cloth nearby when you are contemplating and absorbed in God, which of them will you clutch? Though they may all be important, still from your bundle you will certainly choose something precious, something you treasure, for from the value of one pearl and a single ruby you can produce a thousand ornaments.

From a certain tree, sweet fruit grows. Although that fruit is only a part of the tree, yet God has chosen and distinguished that part above the whole, for in it God deposited a sweetness He did not put in the rest. Because of that flavor, the fruit became superior to the whole and the purpose of that tree. So God declares:

> *"Nay, but they wonder that a warner has come to them from amongst themselves."*

A certain person said, "I have attained a state in which neither Mohammad nor the angel near the Throne is contained." The Sheikh replied, "What is so amazing about having a state where Mohammad is not contained? Yet Mohammad does not have even one state where a stinking creature like you is not contained!"

A certain jester wanted to restore the king to a better mood. Everyone had offered him a certain sum to accomplish this, for the king was deeply vexed. The king was walking angrily along the bank of a river. The jester walked on the other side, across from the king. But the king didn't pay the slightest attention to the jester, he just kept staring into the water. The jester, becoming desperate, said, "O king, what is it that you see in the water?" The king replied, "I see the husband of an unfaithful wife." The jester answered, "Your slave is also not blind."

So, you may have a time when Mohammad is not present, but Mohammad has not even one state where you are not contained. After all, the spiritual states you discovered came from his blessing and influence. For, all gifts are first showered on him, and then they are distributed from him to others. This is the rule. God said, "O Prophet, We have scattered all gifts upon thee." Mohammad then added, "And upon God's loyal servants!"

The way to God is exceedingly dangerous and blocked deep by snow. Mohammad risked his life, driving his horse through and opening up the road. Whoever goes on this path does so by his guidance and guarding. He discovered the road in the first place, and set up way-marks everywhere, posting signs that say, "Do not go in this direction, and do not go that way. If you go down that track you will perish, as the people of 'Ad and Thamud, but if you go in this direction you will be saved. All of the Koran expounds this, for "therein are clear signs"—in other words, upon this road We have set way-marks. If anyone tries to destroy these signs, everyone will attack them, saying, "Why do you destroy the road for us? Why do you work toward our destruction? Are you a highway robber?"

Know that Mohammad is the guide. God says, "Until you first come to Mohammad you cannot reach Us." This is like when you decide to go somewhere; thought leads the way, saying, "Go to this place, it is in your best interests." After that your eyes act as a guide, and then your limbs begin to move, all in that order. But the limbs have no knowledge of eyes, nor the eyes of thought.

Though some people are forgetful, other people don't forget them. But if you work hard in pursuit of this world, you forget your real concern. You must seek God's approval, not the approval of society. Approval, love, and affection are only on loan in us, being placed there by God. If God so wishes, you will find no comfort or joy from any ease, bread, and luxury you possess—everything becomes pain and affliction.

All of these secondary conditions are like a pen in the hand of God's omnipotence. God is the mover and writer. Until He decides, the pen does not move. Your eye is fixed on the pen, so you think, "There must be a hand to this pen." You see the pen, but not the hand. Still, once you see the pen, you remember the hand. There are those, however, who always see the hand. They say, "There must also be a pen in this hand." But seeing the beauty of the hand, they care nothing about the pen. They realize, "Such a hand cannot be without a pen."

While you are so delighted with beholding the pen that you forget the hand, they are so enchanted with the hand, how could they care about the pen? While you find so much pleasure in barley bread that you never try wheat bread, they have wheat bread, so how could they think about barley bread? If He has given you such joy upon earth that you have no desire for heaven—the true place of joy, and the source of life on earth—then, in the same way, why would the inhabitants of heaven remember earth?

Therefore, do not think that happiness and pleasure come from secondary causes, for those realities are merely on loan. It is He who brings pain or gain, for all loss and profit come from Him. Why do you cling so tightly to secondary causes?

"The best words are those that are few and telling." The best words convey a lesson without going on and on. Though in the Koran the Sura, "Say, He is One," is short, still it is superior to the Sura of "The Cow," which is much longer, because of the message it contains. Noah preached for a thousand years and four people rallied around him. We all know how long Mohammad preached, yet the people of so many climes believe in him, and so many saints and "pegs" appeared because of him. A lot or a little is no way to judge. The true object is the lesson received.

With some, a few words convey the lesson better than many. In the same way, if the fire of a stove is too fierce to approach, how can you gain its benefit? But there are a thousand advantages with a feeble lamp. Hence, the benefit gained is the true purpose. With some people it is best not to hear words at all—it is enough for them to see. That is what helps them most; and if they hear words, it only disturbs them.

A certain Sheikh from India came to visit a great saint. When he reached Tabriz and came to the door of the saint's house, he heard a voice from within saying, "Return home! You have attained what you needed by coming to this door. Seeing the saint would only harm you."

A few words that convey a lesson are like a lit lamp that kisses an unlit lamp and then departs. That was enough for him, he had attained his purpose. After all, the prophet is not the outer visible form. That form is only the steed of the prophet. The prophet is that Divine love and affection that is immortal.

Someone asks: "Then why don't they only praise God on the minaret? Why do they also mention Mohammad?"

Rumi answers: Well, praising Mohammad is praising God. It is like saying, "Long live the king, and long live that friend who led me to the king and told me of the king's good name and attributes!" Praising that friend is praising the king.

The Prophet said, "Give me something. I am in need. Either give me your cloak, your wealth, or your clothes." Now, what would he do with your cloak or wealth? He wants to lighten your garment, so that the warmth of the sun can reach you.

*"And lend to God a good loan."*

He does not want wealth and cloak alone. After all, He has given you many things besides wealth: knowledge, thought, wisdom, and vision. He means, "Expend on Me a moment's thought, care, and consideration, since this wealth you gain comes through these gifts I have given."

God asks for alms from bird and snake alike. If you can go before the sun naked, all the better, for that Sun never burns black, it turns you white. Or, at least lighten your clothes to feel the joy of that Sun. You have become accustomed to bitterness. At least for a while try sweetness too!

## COMMENTARY

Just like the whirling dance that Rumi practiced and taught as a spiritual exercise, this discourse spins around a subtle teaching. He wants us to follow his steps, because this will eventually arouse an awakening of the path he is trying to reveal.

Rumi's presence and his words, along with the society of true lovers of God, awaken that essence within us. This spiritual reality moves through our being and life, but we don't always see it. It knows and sees everything about us, but we are so distracted that we often miss it. Yet this factor is what singles out the fruit to become the purpose of the tree.

> *...the prophet is not the outer visible form. That form is only the steed of the prophet. The prophet is that Divine love and affection that is immortal.*

We should not be surprised that there would be one in the world who is also singled out, and that spiritual grace flows first to that one and then from that person on to all others.

> *...and so many saints and "pegs" appeared because of him*

The term "pegs" refers to the image of a tent. At the center, holding up the roof is the Pole of the World, the One who has been singled out. The canvas flows down from that uppermost peak to all the Posts around the edge. These Posts are the saints upon which the secrets of the teaching rest. They know who is the One at the center. Many of these spiritual travelers are hidden, but act as channels for the spiritual teachings in this world. From these Posts come Ropes that hold the canopy of the tent open for humanity. These Ropes are the teachers. The Ropes are tied to Pegs, who are those who ground the path and connect the teaching to the earth. These are the leaders that the public sees and hears.

We are in their society and in their presence whether we realize it or not. We gain all the benefits of the tent they hold open for us, which we experience as inner support. These beings fashion the world of humanity and the whole of the spiritual path in the same way that people make things from the earth. But the world is unaware of Them, just as clay does not understand makers of bricks.

From the moments of inspiration we experience, we can know the reality that shapes us. Through the events that bring grace into our lives, we can glimpse the pen that wrote that grace. If we look and listen, one day we will see the hand that holds that pen.

> *There is no need to become totally preoccupied with worldly affairs. We should take things easily and not get caught in a web of bondage to them, lest in becoming disturbed we bring distress to something greater. The Treasure must not be disturbed, for if this world should worry, That Other World will transform it, but if That Other World is vexed (May we seek refuge with God!) then who will transform That?*

We should be careful not to become so caught up in the things of this world that our own confusion disturbs those who are bringing the grace of spiritual awareness to us. They can lift us over all of our problems. But if we should chase them away, where will our guidance come from?

In other words, always leave the door open for their influence to shape your life and light your path. They are the fruit on the tree. Do not let your worries over the outer world cause you to forget that fruit.

> *You have become accustomed to bitterness. At least for a while try sweetness too!*

# Sixty-Four

EVERY SCIENCE LEARNED in this world through research and experiment is the science of bodies. The science acquired from crossing the portal of death is the science of Soul. Knowing about the philosophy of "I am God" is the science of bodies, but to become "I am God" is the science of Soul. To see the light of the lamp and the fire is the science of bodies; to burn in that fire and lamp's flame is the science of Soul. Everything experienced is the science of Soul; everything based upon knowledge is the science of bodies.

You could also say that truth only comes through seeing—all else is the science of fantasy. For example, an architect thinks through and imagines the building of a school. No matter how correct and accurate the architect's thoughts, it is still fantasy. It becomes reality only after builders actually raise and construct the school.

Now, there are distinctions between fantasy and fantasy. The vision of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali is superior to the revelation of the Companions. Between one person's imagination and another's are great differences. An expert architect pictures the building of a house. Another person with no design experience also imagines a house. However, the distinctions are great, and the architect's plan is closer to reality. It is the same with the world of inner realities and spiritual imagination; there are differences between one person's vision and the vision of others.

They say there are seven hundred veils of darkness and seven hundred veils of light. All the worlds of fantasy are veils of darkness, and all the inner worlds are veils of light. But, the differences in veils of darkness are so subtle it is impossible to distinguish between them; and, despite the vast and enormous distinctions in the word of realities, they can never be fully comprehended by the mind.

## COMMENTARY

Experience is the science of Soul. This is how Soul learns and grows spiritually—through direct, active involvement with Life.

Lessons of science show us the disparity between fantasy and reality. But this is only an understanding of the mind. When it comes to inner realities, there are huge distinctions between enlightened awareness and auto-induced visions. However, we can only recognize the differences through conscious experience.

Material scientists often don't see this and treat all fantasies as unreal, as if one delusion proves all revelations are without substance, and nothing is real but science and reason. But every day we see dreams that move the world toward a deeper understanding, while other dreams mislead people into war. Some imaginative creations inspire through works of art, and some use facts to create visions of fear. There is a world of difference in truth between these.

Those who treat imagination as all the same do not see the way they are creating inwardly. They stop trusting their own consciousness and become split off from their imagination and its creative powers. It is as if they placed a lock upon their essential self, unable to accept what it might imagine and believe. The world of matter seems hard and frozen to them, because they have not developed the inner discrimination of Truth within that melts all illusions and shows things as they are.

The key point Rumi is making is to see that revelations are not all the same, whether you've heard them from others, or from authorities of great repute, or even if they come from within yourself. There are tremendous subtleties needed to separate out the deepest truths, like the mythical swans that can separate water from milk. This understanding comes from an inner science of working with spiritual realities and experiencing the subtle veils of light firsthand. Soul truly knows Truth when it becomes Truth.

In other words, the science of Soul is about states of being and consciousness. The physical sciences are involved only with outward appearances and the knowledge of things. These are two very different types of knowing. One comes from experience and direct awareness, and the other comes from reason and the mind.

# Sixty-Five

THOSE BEINGS LIVING IN HELL are happier there than they would be in this world, for in Hell their awareness turns to God, while in this world they forget. Nothing is sweeter than the awareness of God. Therefore, their desire to return to this world is to work and carry out deeds that awaken them to Divine grace, not because this world is a happier place than Hell.

Hypocrites are consigned to the lowest place in Hell, because they were shown truth but their rejection was stronger. They did nothing with the gift they were given. Their punishment is more severe to help them become aware of God. To those who were never believers, knowingness never came. Their denial of truth is not as strong, and so they need less suffering to become awakened. Between pants with dust on them and a carpet with dust, the trousers only need one person to shake them a little to clean them, while it takes four people beating the rug violently to rid the carpet of its dirt.

The inhabitants of Hell cry:

*"Pour water on us, or from what God has provided you. . . ."*

This is not about a desire for food or drink. They are calling out, "Pour upon us that spiritual reality you have found, and which shines upon you."

The Koran is like a bride who does not show her face to you even when you draw aside her veil. The fact that you have examined her and have not yet attained happiness or mystical unveiling is a sign that your act of trying to remove her veil has itself repulsed her. That is why she appears to you as ugly. She says, "I am no beautiful bride." The Koran shows herself in whatever form she pleases. But if you stop trying to draw aside her veil, and seek only the Koran's good pleasure, watering her fields, attending her from afar, working upon whatever pleases her best, then she will show you her face without any effort.

Seek the people of God, for God does not speak to everyone, just as the kings of this world do not speak to every weaver. They have appointed viziers and deputies to show the way to the king. God has also chosen certain servants, so that whoever seeks can find God in them. All the prophets have come for the reason that only they are the Way.

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## COMMENTARY

The world of Rumi's time was filled with the rampages of Genghis Khan, continual wars, and the angry threats of fundamentalist believers. These are like people living in Hell.

Rumi is explaining to his students that it only brings harm to share the spiritual keys of the path with those who are not ready. It is best to let them continue down their path of self-destruction so they can see the Divine law as it expresses itself in their suffering. This is what awakens them, and in this awakening they will find sweetness.

The secrets of the Koran, which means the secrets of the path itself, are not revealed to everyone. It takes dedication and devotion to Truth before she pulls aside her veil. Don't think you can find true realization by the force of your will, or that these secrets can be shared with just anyone.

If the mysteries of Life are not revealing themselves to you, then seek out those who are blessed with such gifts. Spiritual grace is sent to such lovers of God for the sake of those who are ready to find the Way.

# Sixty-Six

SIRAJ AL-DIN SAYS: "I was speaking to someone about a problem when something began to ache within me."

Rumi says: That something is put in charge of you to stop you from speaking when you should not speak. It is usually so subtle that it goes unnoticed, but when you feel that yearning, compulsion, and pain, you know that something is in control.

For instance, you enter a pool of water and the softness of the flowers and fragrant herbs brush up against you; but, when you get to the other side, thorns prick you. You then realize that one side is a thorn-bed and pain, while the other side is a flowerbed and comfort. These differences come to us through our emotions, yet they are closer to us than anything external.

Hunger and thirst, anger and happiness—these are all invisible. Still, they affect us more than anything we can see. If you close your eyes, you no longer see what is perceivable, but this doesn't drive hunger away. In the same way, the spice in hot dishes and the sweetness and bitterness in foods cannot be seen, yet their flavors create a much stronger impression upon us than the way food looks.

Why do you worry about this body? Why are you so attached to it? You live without it. You are always without it. When nighttime comes you forget the body, but once morning arrives you once again become absorbed in its affairs. Truly, you are never with the body, so why tremble over its concerns? You are not a part of it even for a single hour, but are always elsewhere. Where are you, and where is the body?

*"You are in one valley, and I am in another."*

This body is a great deception.

Pharaoh's magicians paused for an instant, like a speck of dust hanging in the air, and gave up their forms, because they knew they lived apart from the body, and the body was not them. In the same way, Abraham, Ishmael, and all the prophets and saints, having paused, were indifferent to whether the body existed or not.

Hajjaj, who smoked hashish, once shouted, "Don't move the door, or my head will fall off!" He thought his head was disconnected from his body and stayed in place because it was attached to the door. It is the same with people—we think we are connected to the body and need it for our survival.

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## COMMENTARY

Our inner experiences are like spices and herbs in food—they may be invisible but they leave a much stronger impression on us than anything we see.

Spiritual realities are closer to us as Soul than anything physical. We are made of the same substance as Spirit, and therefore are moved inwardly, even though we usually miss such subtle influences.

The comment about the Pharaoh's magicians refers to the following story from Rumi's Masnavi, book III:

*How the magicians of Pharaoh had courage to suffer the amputation of their hands and feet:*

> *It was not because the Pharaoh threatened them with punishment.*
>
> *He thought they were caught up in imagination and terror, distracted, and filled with doubt, so they would be trembling and terrified, filled with fearful and vain thoughts from the threat of their carnal forms.*
>
> *He did not know they had been delivered and were now seated at the window of the heart's light, and they recognized the difference between their shadows and their selves. They were alert, happy, and rejoicing.*
>
> *If the mortar of the Sky should pound them a hundred times in this murky world, they had seen the origins of their composition, so they were not afraid of derivative thoughts.*
>
> *This world is a dream. Do not fall into opinion. If a hand is lost, there is no harm….*
>
> *The Prophet said that this world, with its appearance of substance, is a sleeper's dream. You have taken this saying conventionally, but the travelers of the mystic Way have seen this truth clairvoyantly without any connection to the Prophet.*
>
> *You are asleep during the day. Do not say this is not sleep. Your shadow is a derivation. The origin of that shadow is nothing but moonlight.*[12]

We do not need our body to live, since it is merely our shadow. Our life comes from another realm.

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[12] *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi, Book III*, edited and translated by Reynold A. Nicholson, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, Great Britain, 1990, page 97

# Sixty-Seven

HE CREATED ADAM in His likeness.”

Everyone is seeking the manifestation of God. For example, there are many veiled women who uncover their faces to try the object of their desire, like you might try a razor. There are lovers who say to their beloved, “I could not sleep or eat. I have become like this and that without you.” What they mean is: “You are seeking a manifestation of God. I am the manifestation you can project your belovedness upon.”

In the same way, all scholars and learned people are seeking to manifest God’s desire, “I was a hidden treasure, and I desired to be known.”

“He created Adam in His likeness,” meaning in the likeness of spiritual laws. Divine law is manifest in all creation, because all things are the shadow of God, and the shadow is like the person. If the five fingers spread out, the shadow spreads out. If the body bows, the shadow bows. If the arms stretch out, the shadow also stretches out. Therefore, all people are seeking that sought-after beloved One, for they all desire to be lovers and humble, enemies to our Beloved’s enemies, and friends to our Beloved’s friends. All these are the design and attributes of God that appear in the shadow.

To sum up, this shadow world is unaware of who we really are, but we are aware. However, in comparison to God's knowledge, this awareness of ours is unawareness. Not every aspect of a person shows in their shadow, only certain parts. So, not all the attributes of God show in this shadow world, only some, for

*"You have been given nothing of knowledge except a little."*

## COMMENTARY

We do not realize the full meaning of the needs and desires that move us: The loved One we search for, the fame and attention we want, the adventure we seek. They are reflections of patterns and designs buried deep within our makeup.

But not all things can be seen in the reflections. Only some things are visible this way.

It takes another order of awareness to trace these innate elements of our being back to their source.

# Sixty-Eight

JESUS WAS ASKED, "What is the most difficult thing in this world and the next?" He said, "The wrath of God." They asked, "And what can save us from that?" He answered, "Master your own wrath and anger."

When the mind wants to complain, do the opposite—give thanks. Exaggerate the matter to such a degree that you find within yourself a love for what repels you. Pretending thankfulness is a way of seeking the love of God.

Our Master, Shams, said, "To complain about creation is to complain about the Creator." He also said, "Hatred and rage lie hidden in your subconscious. When you see a spark leap from that fire, extinguish it, so that it will return to non-existence from where it came. If you insist on matching anger with anger and promoting the flame of rage, it will spring faster and faster from your unconscious, and become more and more difficult to put out."

Chase away evil by doing something good, and you triumph over your enemy in two ways: First, your enemy is not another person's flesh and skin, it is the contagiousness of their hatred. When you cast that out by an abundance of thanks, it will inevitably be cast out of your enemy as well, because everyone instinctively responds to kindness, and you have left your opponent with nothing to fight against.

It is the same with children: When they shout names at someone and that person yells back, they are even more encouraged, thinking, "Our words have had an effect." But when your enemy sees their words create no reaction, they lose interest.

The second benefit is this: When the attribute of forgiveness comes forth in you, other people realize they have not been seeing you as you truly are. Then they know that they are the ones to be reproached, not you, and no proof puts adversaries to shame more than that. So, by praising and giving thanks to detractors, you are administering an antidote to the hatred in them, for while they have shown you your deficiency, you have shown them your perfection.

Those who are loved by God can hardly be defective. Thus, let us praise those who criticize us, so their friends will think, "It is our friends who are at odds with the Sufis, since the Sufis always speak well towards our friends."

*Though they are powerful,*
*Pluck out their beards politely.*
*Firmly break their necks,*
*Though they are high and mighty.*

May God assist us in that!

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## COMMENTARY

No doubt, Rumi saw a pattern developing amongst his students and was showing a way to change that cycle.

Whatever course in life we take, we can expect to be attacked and criticized. This was just as true in Rumi's time as it is today. But those of us searching for Truth must change the habitual way we react to anger.

There is no need to worry about defending ourselves, once we have committed to the spiritual path, because our lives are now being guided toward whatever is best for our unfoldment. Therefore, we are better off learning how to welcome opposition as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Searching for the lesson and benefit hidden in the confrontation awakens us to the meaning of the moment. This is how we can find the gift being given.

This change in us also touches others, since thankfulness is just as contagious as anger.

# Sixty-Nine

TWO VEILS separate human beings from God: health and wealth. All other veils come from these. Those who are healthy don't search for God and don't see Him, but as soon as pain afflicts them they cry out, "O God! O God!" calling out and surrendering. Therefore, health is their veil and God is hidden in their pain.

As long as people are wealthy, they gratify their desires and are preoccupied night and day with pleasures. The moment poverty appears, their self-esteem weakens and they turn to God.

*Drunkenness and poverty brought You to me,*
*I am the slave of Your intoxication and need!*

God granted Pharaoh four hundred years of life, kingship and enjoyment. It was all a veil that kept him far from the presence of God. He experienced not even a single day of difficulty and pain, so that he would completely forget God. God said, "Go on being preoccupied by your own desires. Do not even think of me. Good night!"

*King Solomon grew weary of his reign,*
*But Job was never sated of his pain.*

## COMMENTARY

We should be thankful for the troubles we have. They help us step back from our headlong rush after desires and show us the greater and more important purpose of life.

*Drunkenness and poverty brought You to me,*
*I am the slave of Your intoxication and need!*

It is our need and longing that draw spiritual assistance to our side. Our emptiness attracts real grace. Once we have found that, we want nothing else. Therefore, spiritual growth depends upon awakening to the true meaning of our need.

# Seventy

RUMI SAYS: Some people say that in the human soul lurks an evil not found in animals and wild beasts, but this does not mean that people are worse than beasts. Rather, this evil character and darkness of soul in the human being hides a secret essential element. The more precious and noble that element is, the greater the veil needed to hide it, and such veils cannot be removed without great effort.

Spiritual struggles are of various kinds. The greatest is to spend time with friends who have turned their faces to God and turned their backs on this world. There is no more difficult combat than this, for the very sight of them dissolves our ego and worldly desires. That is why people say that if a snake has seen no human for forty years it becomes a dragon, since it has seen no one who could stop the growth of its own evil nature.

Wherever men or women put a big lock, that is a sign of something precious and valuable. Just like the snake that guards a treasure, do not regard a person's ugliness, but look instead at the preciousness of their treasure.

## COMMENTARY

Rumi sees that his students, just as most people, are preoccupied with how horrible other people can be. They can spend endless hours of talking about the evil of others, asking: How can people be so bad?

Take another look, Rumi says: These evil qualities exist because they are veils hiding something incredibly precious.

If a bird of prey should kill a helpless animal, we wouldn't call this evil, because this is their nature and their means of survival. But, seeing a human being kill another person shows us something deeply wrong. This is because we know that cruelty stands out in stark contrast to how caring people act. Therefore, something is seriously wrong in the subconscious minds of murderers, because a healthy person is noble and kind. We say this kind of evil is a sickness, and this means exactly what Rumi is saying: This darkness is a veil hiding the essential element of what those who commit evil really are.

To discover the hidden treasure of our true substance, however, takes effort and self-sacrifice.

*There is no more difficult combat than this….*

Those who gain positions of power and start abusing their authority often become more brutal and heartless until they are stopped.

> *That is why they say that if a snake has seen no human for forty years it becomes a dragon, since it has seen no one who could stop the growth of its own evil nature.*

Yet, don't look at their ugliness and their horrible acts; look at the treasure of their own true nature that is hidden by the veil of this illness. They cannot see the precious jewel they possess at the moment. But we should make a practice of always looking for it in others. By seeing through the veils to their true self, we help them awaken. Know that one day they will recover from this malady and will return to their true selves.

In other words, Rumi is showing how to turn this preoccupation with the evil of others into a spiritual exercise that helps us find treasures in others, because this also helps us see the jewels hidden within ourselves.

# Seventy-One

THE DIFFERENCE between birds on the wing and lovers of God is that birds always fly in a certain direction, while lovers of God fly on the wings of their desire away from all directions.

Every horse has its stable, every beast its pen, every bird its nest. And God knows best.

## COMMENTARY

Lovers of God do not put all of their hopes, dreams, and desires into any belief or goal, in this world or the next. They are lifted by a wind that carries them far away from all such things into the arms of the Whole.

And with this last discourse, Rumi, himself, took wing away from all directions…

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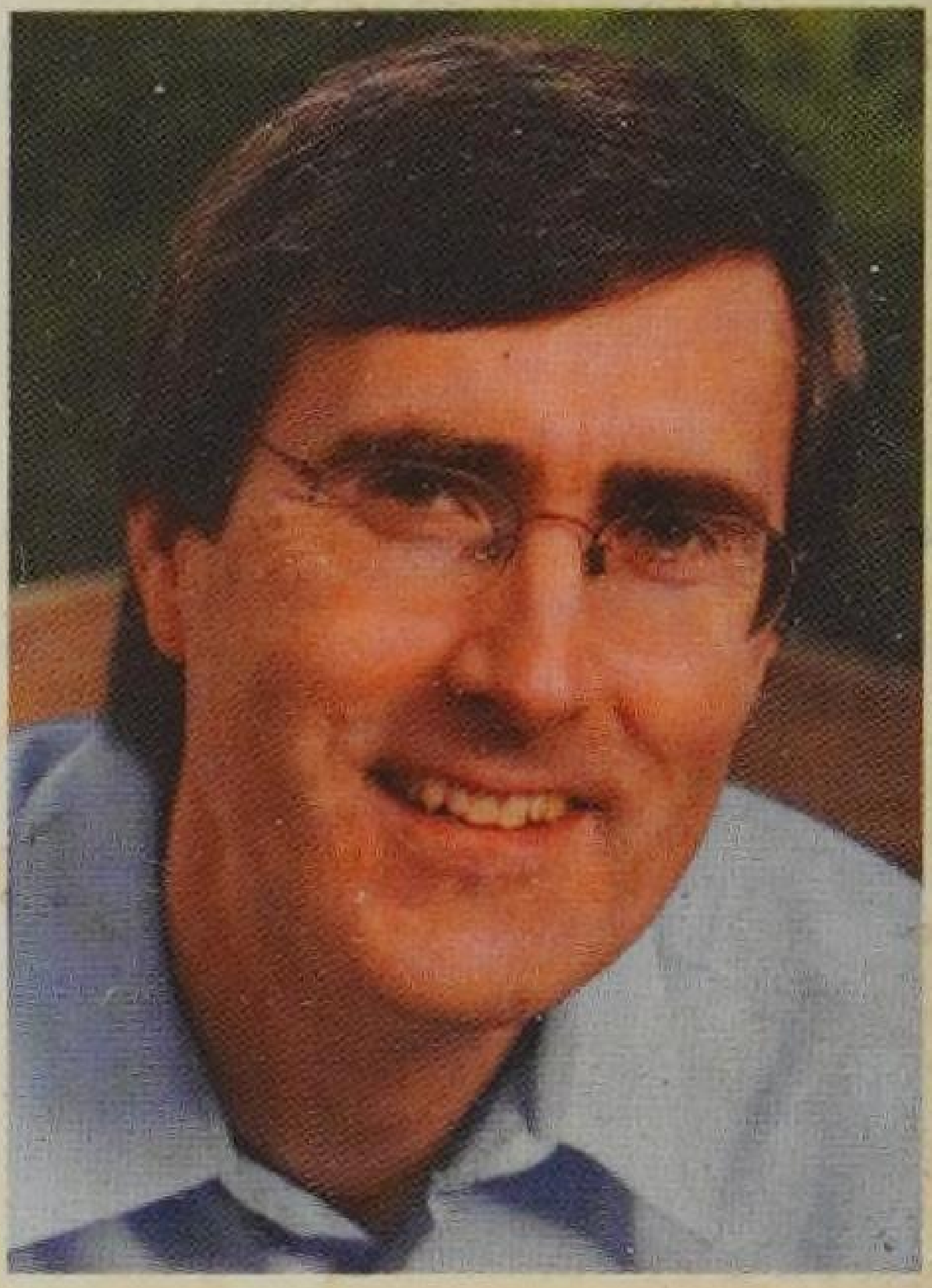
**New Translation and Commentary by Doug Marman**



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